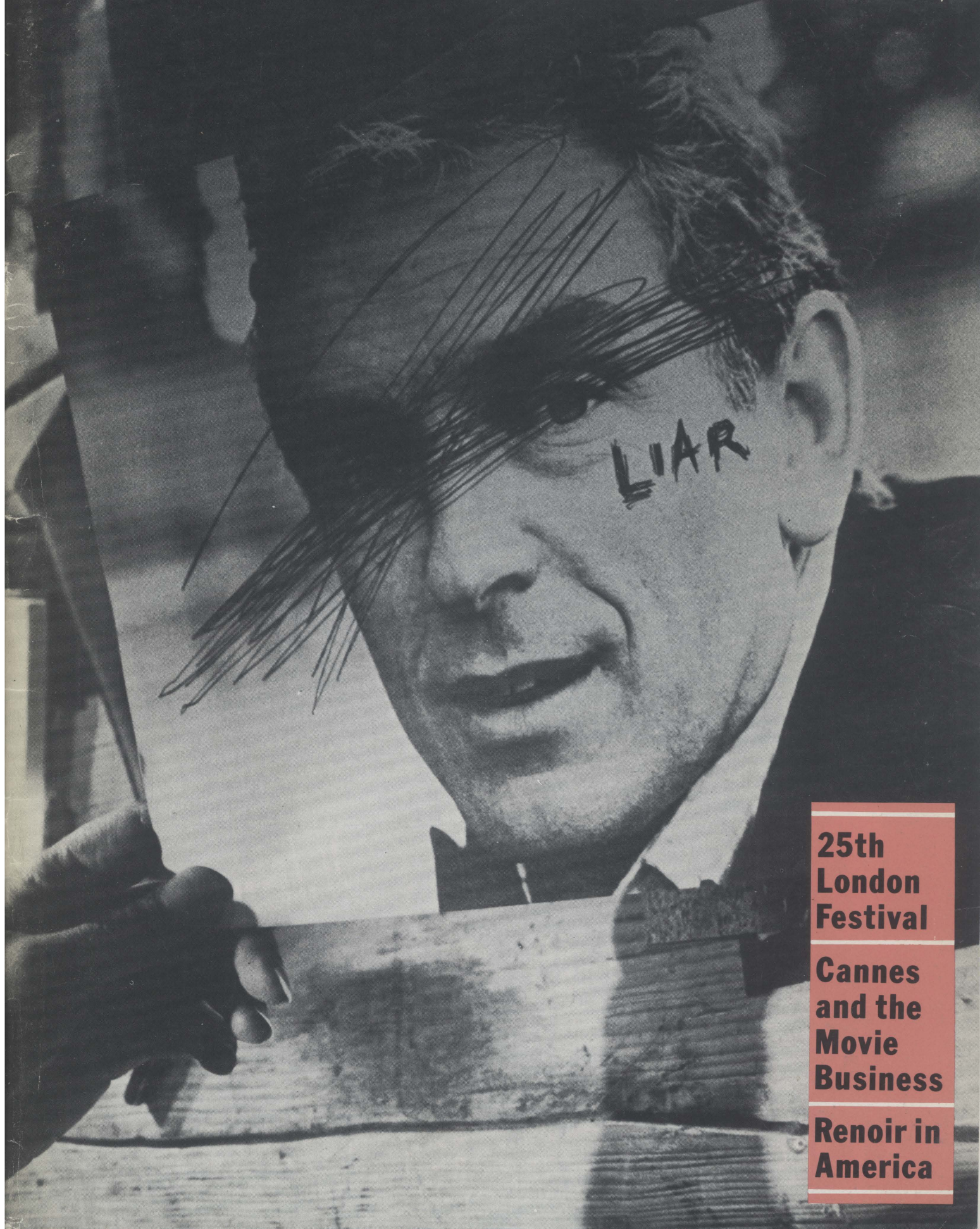


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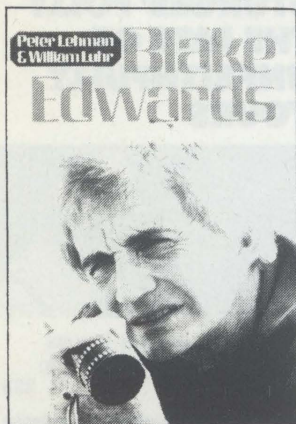
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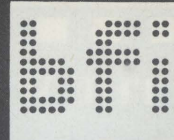
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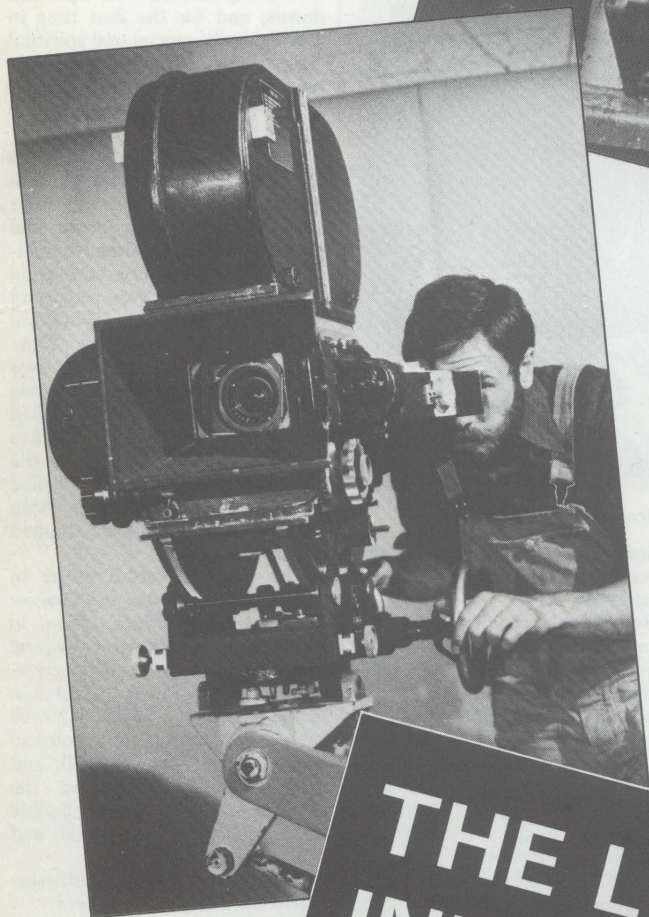
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IN THE PICTURE

One Man's War

Edgardo Cozarinsky's new film about the lies and half-truths of Occupied France

The shifting boundaries of fiction and documentary cinema are once again in dispute in Edgardo Cozarinsky's new film, *La Guerre d'un seul Homme*. A film described by its director as 'made up of quotations', it is also a dialogue between French newsreels of the Occupation period and the Parisian journals of German writer Ernst Jünger, then an officer in the occupying army: a third viewpoint is provided by the official drone of a French newsreel narrator. Thus, a film collage that would have delighted Walter Benjamin (whose project of a book composed of quotes was never realised) and that takes its logical place in the director's filmography. The dialogue of Cozarinsky's first film, *Dot Dot Dot* (1969), was culled from newspaper clippings; in his second, *Les Apprentis-Sorciers* (1977), scenes from Büchner's *Dantons Tod* engaged in 'dialogue' with what was basically a film noir plot to illuminate the ambiguities of the revolutionary myth.

A disenchanted right-wing aristocrat, Jünger came to deplore Hitler yet remained as incapable of opposing him as of realising the complicity involved in his 'interior exile'. His diaries comment on the spirit of collaboration that the film sets out to investigate, with counterpoint provided by the aggressively vulgar commentary of the French narrator and public statements from personalities of the time. It's a nightmarish, fascinating revue of patriotism, anti-semitism and unrelenting frivolity. Fashion is the enduring aspect of *la vie parisienne* that Cozarinsky favours most in his montage. The original newsreel soundtrack stresses the resourcefulness of Parisians in keeping up with their city's reputation: in 1940, it's fashionable hats made of newspaper; in 1944, textiles made of dog-hair. 'One can imagine,' says Cozarinsky, 'the same voice praising in 1948 the same ingenuity in fashioning sports jackets from the skin of Jews, had the outcome of the war been different.'

It took only a few hours for Cozarinsky to obtain financial backing from Holland, Switzerland and Germany, then three years to obtain the indispensable co-operation of the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, legal custodian of the newsreel footage. In 1978 they were not interested; in 1979 they would only embark on the project if there was a *commande* from one of the French television channels; then, in 1980, they accepted it as a pilot



War-time poster, reproduced in *'La Guerre d'un seul Homme'*.

for a series on *Writers and Their Time*, as a film no longer than 55 minutes. 'I refused, of course, because I had brought them a film project: I wanted a negative to exist, not merely a video transfer of work prints, as is the rule on TV. Also, I needed a running time of at least a hundred minutes for the passage of time, the gradual interaction of public lies and private half-truths, to be felt by the viewer.' Happily, the bureaucratic labyrinth led to Manette Bertin and Jean Collet, whose creative viewpoint remained untinged by the profit policy imposed on the INA during the last years of the Giscard government.

A montage of ideas and events, of music and voices, of existing records, *La Guerre d'un seul Homme* is less about how history is made than about what history leaves out. The film is not just about Occupied France but, more acutely, about the difficult, compromised survival of the nation's cultural myth, not to mention French national humour. At a tea party, Jünger traded epigrams with Sacha Guitry, who reminded his fellow Frenchmen of the risks of collaboration; especially, added Guitry after a beat, when writing for the stage. Hundreds of minor figures occupy the screen as actors making guest appearances: Zarah Leander, Jean Cocteau, Reinhard Heydrich, Franz Lehar conducting a full army orchestra under huge swastikas at the Palais de Chaillot, Pierre Laval dwarfed by a bodyguard of high-ranking German

officers as he delivers a speech asserting France's devotion to the Nazi cause.

Surprisingly, the film shapes up as a sort of musical, organised in four movements, scored with lieder, chamber and symphonic music. The Aryanis Pfitzner and Strauss battle for the soundtrack with composers of 'degenerate' music such as Schoenberg and Schreker. The fourth of Strauss' Four Last Songs (actually the first to be composed, right after the end of the war) is heard in all its crepuscular pathos over the exulting images of liberated Paris.

For Jünger's voice-over comments, Cozarinsky rejected any voice with a German accent, wary of the colourful effect such a voice could achieve. He chose instead a French stage actor of Scandinavian descent, Niels Arestrup (who played Danton in *Les Apprentis-Sorciers*). 'I thought a French voice was necessary—it brings home even more strongly Jünger's reflections and it prevents the traditional identification of certain ideology with Germany. I wanted to lend a critical ear to the discourse of Fascism. Since I was a child I've been seeing vociferous anti-Fascist movies, the kind that know all the answers and plainly evade the questions. They didn't prevent Fascism from developing a new and strong movement almost everywhere. I know what I'm talking about. I'm Argentinian and I lived there most of my life until Peron returned with a left-wing face-lift.'

CARLOS CLARENS

Cracow

'Polish documentary treats ... the building of the new and the fighting of the old as if it were a Himalayan expedition'

A revolution is not a single event, but a series of crises which hindsight shows as coalescing into a process. The Polish movement which began with the Gdansk shipyard strike in August 1980 is still going through its ups and downs; and for the first time in history, such a social and spiritual change has been consistently recorded on film, in spite of efforts by the Party to maintain strict censorship.

As David Robinson noted in his report on the Gdansk feature film festival (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1979/80), a 'moral concern and public spirit' were already manifested in the features shown in 1979. In 1980, the very proximity of the celebrated shipyard enhanced the importance of the Festival, where the highlight was an unscheduled surprise screening of five documentaries which had previously been banned. All five were included in a TV series of the banned documentaries called *Fact Studio*, which ran from October until summarily stopped in May 1981.

The next concerted effort to resist censorship was the Cracow National Short Film Festival in early June. In addition to several films about the Solidarity movement, the Polish selection included many which showed economic, social or political abuses before August 1980, and many which touched on the debates about the possible methods for a new social and political structure.

It was summed up by Boleslaw Michalek, the jury president: '... The subject matter of these films was unknown to the Polish public ... the Polish documentary treats the strikes, the building of the new and the fighting of the old as if it were a Himalayan expedition. These spheres of our life were bypassed, taboo ... This, of course, should all be done by TV. But it doesn't do it, although it has the technical facilities. It doesn't, because everywhere—including Poland—television is not only the property of the establishment (to put it mildly) but is simply its mouthpiece ... Television creates myths, is a form of spiritual tyranny, and is the voice of the system: whereas documentary films are a demystifying, rational, human, personal and free form of expression.'

The Primer, by Wojciech Wiszniewski, won the Grand Prix in the Polish section. It has an ABC of poetic images to sum up the state of the nation, leading to a famous rhymed catechism for children about who, where and what they are, ending with the

question 'what do you believe?' With a mute, derisive look, the children turn and walk away. The second prize went to *Monument* by Tomasz Lengren and Marian Terlecki, in which an old woman recounts with a touching mixture of banality and pathos her son's death in the 1970 riots, and his hurried, unofficial funeral. Her recollections are intercut with shots of the monument to the 1970 victims unveiled last year, which stands as a symbol of a proudly, resolutely Catholic country; but it is a heavy cross.

Bohdan Kosinski's *The Birth of Solidarity* and Ineusz Engler's *August and September* are likewise emotional responses to the recent past. Of the other prize-winners, both Irena Kamienska's *Women Workers* and Krzysztof Kwinta's *The White Lady* illustrated the Victorian squalor in factories, while *Microphone Test* by Marcel Lozinski pilloried a factory management's reactions to a set of interviews with workers about their participation in management—or rather, its complete absence.

Since many festival guests came from the USSR and Eastern Europe, even in the stale air of the unventilated Kijow cinema some gasped eagerly at the breath of freedom while others gasped with horror at the shockingly open, outspoken films. But, like a damp patch on the carpet, Jerzy Sladowski's *The Limit*, beautifully photographed by Ryszard Jaworski, caused the predominantly Eastern European juries to step over it delicately. It is about Warsaw junkies who boil a narcotic from poppyseed. With this far from sterile brew in their syringes, these junkies are on a shorter road to the cemetery than Russian or Hungarian glue-sniffers. But the jury members insisted in every Slav language that since there is no drug problem in any Socialist country,

the film is really irrelevant...

There were also some pleasant obliquities, as in *Cuttings* by Zygmunt Dus, a montage of rejected footage from newsreels and documentaries, or in Krzysztof Krauze's sly *Practical Advice For Butterfly Collectors*. But, whether adding the delight of irony or drumming in their cause with straight reportage, the current Polish use of the documentary produces more exciting films than the use of the short film as a young director's visiting card, which is the accepted practice in the West. The comparison was weighted further by a retrospective of two masters of the genre: Wiszniewski, who died this year, at the age of 37, and his colleague and friend Marcel Lozinski. The few over-earnest, inept or wordy Polish contributions slipped past almost unnoticed among so much good stuff, which made the international competition seem like a ragbag of undermotivated documentaries, indulgent expressions of still unformed selves, or sponsored sludge.

The exception was a block programme of nine well-made Yugoslav entries, illustrating the difference between the new Polish films and those carefully hinting that not everything runs well in the state-run society. But there were too many stoical, taciturn Yugoslav peasants guarding the humane values against the onslaught of technocrats.

Most of the prizes were deservedly won by the Polish documentaries, although the Grand Prix went to Atahualpa Lichy's *The ABC of the Maréchal*, about Pétain's relentless propaganda to win over French children, which led them to succumb to Nazism in the Marshal's wake. Formally elegant, with a worthy message, the film still seemed a little static compared to the urgency of the Polish work.

MARI KUTTNA

Time out

Londoners' 'alternatives' have been shaken by the 'Time Out' dispute

Without forcing the parallel too far, it seems more than coincidental that the growth over the past few years of adventurous independent film exhibition outlets in London has coincided with the journalistic phenomenon of *Time Out* magazine, the so-called guide to alternative life in the capital, with its sometimes self-consciously rebarbative content. The publication's influence has been twofold: both in providing editorial promotion for offbeat, dubiously commercial movies, and in the practically informational sense of possessing a format expansive enough to admit detailed listing of frequently compendious programmes. The scale of this influence can perhaps be judged not just from a circulation which earlier this year was running at over 80,000, but from the disclosure by a recent readership survey that some 30 per cent of purchasers bought the magazine solely for its film coverage.

Early this summer, however, the independent cinemas suddenly found this familiar lifeline cut, as the climax of a dispute between the journal's publisher and staff, over 'equal pay', removed *Time Out* from the streets. AS SIGHT AND SOUND went to press, the dispute had just ended, with the magazine due to reappear during September, but minus most of its sacked staff, who have opted to set up a new publication, *City Limits*. This will apparently have a similar format, while aiming to be more politically committed. At the same time, October will see the launch of a new entertainments guide, *Events*.

How far the ostensible vacuum

might have affected conventional film exhibition, it is virtually impossible to say, though Chris Auty, *Time Out*'s ex-film editor, suggests that the relatively disappointing performance of *Melvin and Howard* might not have been the case had the magazine appeared with a planned cover feature on the movie (he cites by comparison the good financial showing of *Heart Beat*, a movie touted by *Time Out* not long before). Certainly it is true that one of the summer's perhaps unpredictable hits, Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl*, managed very well without benefit of the 'alternative' imprimatur—though with, it should be said, that of an extensive and expensive publicity campaign by its distributor.

On the other hand, when Forsyth's *That Sinking Feeling* was given a run at the ICA cinema this summer, business was, admits the ICA's film officer Archie Tait, discouragingly poor. This, and the fact that audiences have overall been cut by as much as 50 per cent, he attributes in large part to *Time Out*'s non-appearance. At the Ritzy in Brixton, which suffered a setback in the spring from the adverse effect on attendances of the riots on its doorstep, the stoppage was lamented as having come at the worst possible time: audiences generally have fallen by about a third, and for the more archive-oriented Sunday matinées by as much as a half. The Scala cinema was in the tricky situation of having summarily to vacate its Tottenham Street premises and subsequently start up at King's Cross at the very time of the dispute (Chris Auty mentions the move as a news story that the *Time Out* films section would have covered prominently), and Jayne Pilling of the Scala speaks of the crucially increased overhead of advertising in, for instance, local weeklies.

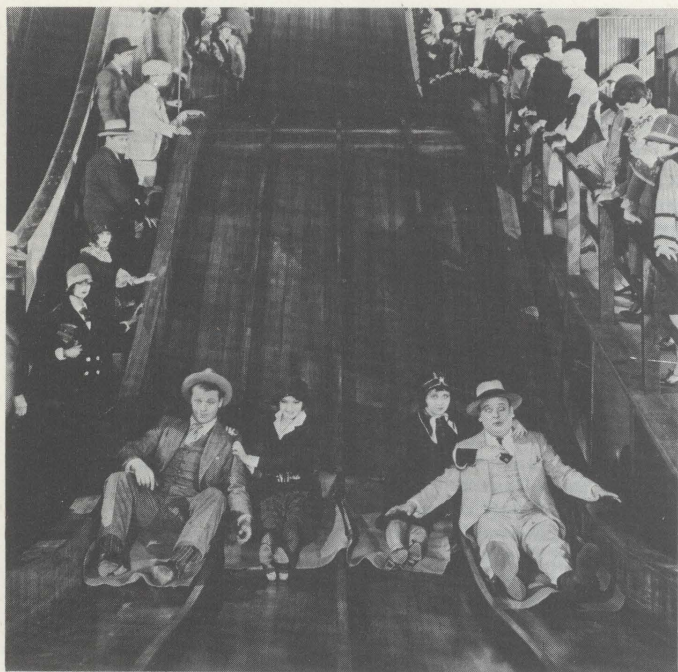
At the longest established of the independent rep cinemas, the Electric in West London, programme director Peter Howden suggested that despite a steep initial fall in audiences, the cinema's clientèle had begun to show an enhanced 'self-sufficiency' and the attendance level was more or less back to normal (though he shrewdly pointed out that you never knew how much better things might have been in other circumstances). His real worry—and it is one entertained in various measure by all the cinemas mentioned here—was about the extent to which the absence of a tacitly but specifically recognised publicity forum might dictate an element of playing safe in future programming. That danger would appear to have been averted—but it remains to be seen whether the new spread of publications will in the longer run enforce, or merely disperse, the function over which *Time Out* once held such undisputed sway.

TIM PULLEINE



Bohdan Kosinski's 'The Birth of Solidarity'.

IN THE PICTURE



'The Crowd': on the slide at Coney Island.

Crowd Music

Carl Davis on his new score for King Vidor's 'The Crowd'

The indefatigable Carl Davis, who shaped and conducted the five-hour musical accompaniment to last year's *Napoleon*, is at work on a score for King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) which will be heard for the first time, it is hoped, at the London Film Festival. Davis, who writes ballet music and has, most recently, a credit on *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is also currently scoring *The Unknown Chaplin*, two TV programmes compiled by the Hollywood team from Chaplin's huge archive of out-takes.

The Crowd was chosen from a list of films that Thames TV is planning to present with original scores, chiefly because its hero is no Napoleon. The man (played by James Murray) is a winsome, hopelessly optimistic loser, trying to make his mark in the Depression against the faceless crowd whose members compete for success on the New York streets. No drum rolls accompany his progress. The only glory is the love of his beautiful wife (Eleanor Boardman), who makes a heaven of his home when, outside, life is hell. Do you really need the range of the Wren Orchestra for such an intimate story? 'You need that and more, because the emotions are huge,' Davis says. 'Simple emotions set against the cynical background of city life. The cinema is going to be aware.'

Davis works by homing on the ideas at the core of a film. In *Napoleon* he incorporated existing musical themes, using Beethoven's *Eroica*, of course, to match the dignity of the hero. The score for *The Crowd*, how-

ever, is entirely new: his two principal themes reflect the opposition between the hostility of the anonymous 'crowd' and the warmth of a forgiving family. 'First, I was struck by the powerful image of New York in the film. It's where I was born, and in many ways I was that boy making good. When I see the film, I hear 20s jazz-flavoured music, Gershwin and Kurt Weill. Not improvisation, but a kind of Broadway jazz mix. The soulful trumpet echoing in the chasms between tall buildings. Music to match the visual power and ingenuity of the film that reflects the work of the continental directors of the time, German expressionist films like Murnau's *Sunrise*, shots that are constantly on the move, with steep, high angles. And against this there has to be some really melting melody, something that can break your heart.'

Once the themes for the film are in his head, Davis works out the instruments which will 'speak' them. 'With a silent film, the instruments are the only voices you hear, and I have to discover what kind of voices I need quite early on.' Here Davis will have a trumpet backed by a brass section, a guitar ('It was the period of Django Reinhardt') as well as a piano.

With the cast of voices established, he next breaks the film down. A TV set sits on top of Davis' grand piano, playing a specially recorded videotape of the film. To help with the precise timing of sequences, the tape has a digital time code. From this Davis compiles a notebook, a short list of precise timings. It is a system he devised while working on the *Hollywood* series and allows him more easily to construct his musical paragraphs.

'With *Napoleon*, I knew I would have no stopwatch during

the performances. Even though I had the time code, I couldn't compose by it as precisely as if I were going into the studio to record music. I couldn't be quite so mathematically minded because in a live screening I would not have the aids of a sound studio. So in the end I found I was composing more and more to the pictures on the screen. It's like composing and conducting for a ballet. Instead of a rapport with the dancers, you have a rapport with the screen. Of course, the screen is unvarying, but the players and myself are not, we are the human factor.'

The success of *Napoleon* led to Thames TV's decision to commission original scores for a series of silent films. Three or four films a year may be completed for eventual screening on Channel Four and video distribution through MGM. Davis believes that if possible the scores should be performed live. 'The experience of *Napoleon* showed how a score can be improved if it is revised after a live performance. At the first performances I found myself caught out, having to conduct too fast or too slowly for the mood of a scene to make the music fit. Mainly I found I had overwritten. I was hurrying the orchestra too much, so I began to edit. By the end, the length was right, but it was always dicey, for every performance. Overall, we had a great success because the heart of the music was there, but during editing I also had a chance to reassess the details. Only by playing music again and again to the film can you refine the score sufficiently to create a really superb performance for recording.'

MUNDY ELLIS

Running on Empty

The 35th Edinburgh Film Festival

It wasn't the easiest year for Jim Hickey to make his debut as Edinburgh's new Director. As if Lynda Myles weren't a hard enough act to follow, he was hedged about by problems: an inherited financial deficit, an 'austerity' budget, a curtailed time-span of just nine days, and more than his share of last-minute no-shows and programme changes. In the event, he acquitted himself with considerable aplomb (promising a return to a full two-week programme next year), and the Festival reaffirmed its position as Britain's most committedly exploratory film event.

Edinburgh opened with John Carpenter's intermittently wonderful *Escape From New York* and closed with a notably vigorous performance of Gance's *Napoleon* with the Carl Davis score. Inevitably, few films in the intervening week charmed the

crowds as much as those, but there was a sufficient profusion of mini-retrospectives, independent movies of many and various provenances, avant-garde experiments and sheer off-the-wall oddities to keep virtually any viewer engaged, happy or provoked. No fewer than three special events were crammed into the nine days: a dispiriting survey of contemporary Brazilian cinema, an historical survey of Portuguese cinema and a six-programme retrospective of films by Raul Ruiz. Three features by young Hong Kong directors (selected from the Panorama of South-East Asian Cinema at Berlin) went down well enough to be taken by several people as a further sub-section of the Festival in themselves.

Raul Ruiz took time off from shooting *The Territory* in Rotterdam for Roger Corman to make a 24-hour visit to the Festival; Edinburgh veterans recalled that Corman himself had done the same while shooting *The Red Baron* around a decade ago. This small symmetry—not unlike something out of a Raul Ruiz film—underlined the fact that Ruiz was a particularly suitable case for Edinburgh treatment. When his recent French work began to hit the European festival circuit a couple of years ago, tantalising hints of Ruiz' bizarre background began to emerge: a Chilean militant from the Allende years, a political exile in Paris, a vaguely Borgesian formalist with a distinct streak of iconoclasm. How, though, did a compatriot and contemporary of Miguel Littin and Patricio Guzman metamorphose into the director of an arcane Klossowskian joke like *Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*? Edinburgh started to provide the answers, with screenings of what survives of his Chilean work and sundry bits and pieces from his years of exile.

It quickly emerged that the one constant factor in Ruiz' career is a kind of benign subversion: wherever they get made, in whatever circumstances they are produced, his movies consistently propose themselves as one thing and then displace all expectations by mix'n'matching various tones, genres and styles. The process is



Ruiz' 'La Vocation suspendue'.

already at work in his first feature, *Three Sad Tigers* (1968), an ostensibly melodramatic tale of a trio of middle-aged urban no-hopers which spends an hour or so systematically refusing all the 'dramatic' possibilities of the material and then erupts into shocking violence at the moment the moral (political?) issues snap into focus. *Dialogue of Exiles* (1974), his first film in France, turns out to be neither a platform for political breast-beating nor an earnest study of displaced persons but a bitter, absurdist soap opera, each of its vignettes highlighting incompetence, cowardice or directionlessness. The short *Colloque des chiens* (1978) confines its visuals to ambiguous and contradictory still photographs while an off-screen narrator turns extracts from pulp crime novels into a perfectly Borgesian fiction. Constructing a full Ruiz retrospective will clearly be a nightmare, so dispersed and inaccessible are many of the movies, but it's equally clearly something of a priority.

It might have been kinder to leave the Brazilian cinema in abeyance, and to have waited for less straitened circumstances to explore the Portuguese cinema; neither event came near to fulfilling its potential. Glauber Rocha's death, almost exactly coincident with the screening of his *The Age of Earth*, lent a certain poignancy to the Brazilian screenings, but the discovery earlier in the week that Nelson Pereira dos Santos is now making the Brazilian equivalent of Cliff Richard vehicles (*On the Highway of Life*, a crassly complacent celebration of the rise to fame of a folk-singing duo) was a setback that diehard fans of *cinema novo* may never recover from. The Portuguese event, bedevilled by constant programme changes, simply needed more room to breathe. With many of its screenings relegated to decidedly unsocial hours, few were able to give it wholehearted attention; random sampling revealed more misses (Lauro Antonio's *Morning Mist*, a rehash of Bellocchio's *In the Name of the Father* without the anarchic humour) than hits (Rui Simoes' *Good Portuguese People*).

Of the Hong Kong films, Tsui Hark's *Dangerous Encounter* and Ann Hui's *The Spooky Bunch* have already been noted in SIGHT & SOUND from Berlin. The third, Allen Fong's first feature *Father and Son*, is perhaps the most unexpected of the three, marking a genuinely new departure in Chinese cinema. Its exploration of a distinctively Hong Kong generation gap (uneducated father trying to cosset his only son at the expense of his daughters, while the boy gets expelled from one school after another) comes closer to western notions of social realism than any Chinese movie yet, although Fong is as interested in the imaginative lives of his

characters as in their social situation. The Festival also found space for a precedent-setting programme of Super-8 movies from Hong Kong; highlights in a mixed selection were Jim Shum's *Rhythm* and Danny Yung's *Journey*, both of which conjure unpredictable connections between seemingly unrelated shots.

The main body of the festival was the traditional melée of independents, politicos, film students and avant-gardists, all clamouring for recognition. The National Film School offered two gems in Peter Berry's *Bread*, a comedy about the night-shift in a bakery that also works as an oblique metaphor for a country falling apart, and Jenny Wilkes' and Jennie Howarth's... *And They Called Me Pussy Dynamite*, a documentary portrait of a woman dancer who aspired to Covent Garden but found herself in the back streets of Soho. The BFI Production Board showed *Maeve* and *Burning an Illusion*, and hosted a press conference to announce the participation of the likes of Julie Christie and Janet Suzman in its coming year's lineup. Mick Eaton's *A Description of the World*, using the dialogues between Marco Polo and Rustichello as a droll starting point for a series of reflections on the process of reportage, showed that Britain's regional arts associations can still sometimes back winners.

Two independent features stood out from the mass of competent and/or under-achieved films. Connie Field's *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* is an hour-long documentary about the American women who were put to industrial work during the Second World War, and the fates that befell them when their husbands and brothers were demobbed. On paper, it's an orthodox compilation of talking heads and archive footage from the period; in practice, it's a devastatingly funny, rueful and provocative film, shot and edited with such intelligence and precision that not a single point needs to be hammered out explicitly. It is also one of the very few films of its kind that succeeds in actualising its issues; it is as much about the present as the past. Frank Ripplöh's scandalous *Taxi to the Loo* does for gay men what Het Werkteater's *In For Treatment* did for cancer victims: it exposes all the things that are usually concealed, with great good humour, and winds up extending everyone's notions of what can be charming, touching or outright hilarious. Ripplöh plays himself as an affectionate pastiche of the protagonist of *Nighthawks*, a liberal school-teacher by day and a compulsively promiscuous cruiser by night. His candour about his sexual habits is matched by a generous measure of irony at his own expense. He has nothing to be ashamed of.

TONY RAYNS

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Cannes, Festivals and the Movie Business

Simon Perry

Cannes was different this year. The festival that has long and unquestionably ranked as the key event of the busy film calendar—that is known to be a pinnacle and a focus even by those who know nothing else about the industry—was entirely bereft of tension.

The first sign was the lack of people. No one could remember a Cannes when last-minute hotel bookings could be achieved without multilingual remonstrations and unrecorded surcharges, if they could be achieved at all. To their amazement, film folk found themselves ushered swiftly to tables, where the normal pattern had been to spend more time ogling other people's dinners than bolting their own in order to catch a screening. In contrast to 1980, the sun shone vigorously, but there always seemed to be free chairs on the Carlton terrace and, most remarkably, responsive waiters.

Then there was the lack of hype. Sartorial freebies such as inscribed tee-shirts, bomber-jackets and badges; party invitations issued more or less indiscriminately; publicity stunts on the beaches... vacuous and fallacious trappings at the best of times, but their sudden scarcity this year was arresting. It was as if the head of froth on a glass of beer—mere empty bubbles, but an essential part of its presentation—had collapsed. Even standard publicity seemed much reduced. United Artists once again dominated the front of the Carlton with a revolving display and gigantic cut-outs of the naked legs from the *For Your Eyes Only* poster mounted over the porch. But the only other company to splash out on space was EMI; indeed the British company was the one 'major' to behave traditionally at the 1981 festival, unveiling big production plans and beating the drum for its future policy and position in the industry. For the most part, formerly lavish publicity budgets had been trimmed, as witnessed most effectively by the fact that one of the huge billboard sites right beside the terrace bore a house advertisement for the festival.

Finally, many visitors attested to the lack of good films—or, in the parlance

of marketeers, playable product. That opinion, being ultimately subjective, was fiercely contested from some quarters. But the festival's director, Gilles Jacob, vouchsafed his own disappointment at the standard of films in competition, and despite new films from Bernardo Bertolucci, Francesco Rosi, John Boorman and Alain Tanner, it was notable that the only real excitement was generated by speculation as to whether Andrzej Wajda's latest picture, *Man of Iron*, would actually arrive.

Even then it was a peculiar kind of excitement. For reasons that were political and emotional as much as artistic, the film was regarded as virtually a foregone winner of the Palme d'Or if it was shown, whereas in its absence the jury would be forced to choose a winner that would do the festival far less credit—that would underline, in fact, what a poor and puzzling year it had been. The excitement was really apprehension; that without the Wajda picture the two weeks down at Movie Mecca would have yielded nothing to justify Jacob's insistence on referring to competition films as 'events'. The

Polish print's arrival on the second weekend of the festival was greeted with relief more than anything by the authorities, while the press and other pundits promptly abandoned their somewhat half-hearted 'hot tips' of the last ten days (one tipster claimed that Gallic hauteur towards the US would manifest itself in the award going to the commercially disastrous *Heaven's Gate*; then American critics got up a defiance of their European counterparts with some flag-waving for *Chariots of Fire*) and bowed gratefully to the inevitable result. But if the price of redemption for the 1981 Cannes festival's image was a certain lack of





Rituals of Cannes: lunching the press; Croisette crowd for an evening screening (David Puttnam arriving for 'Chariots of Fire'); 007 dominating the Carlton entrance.

tension surrounding the prize-giving ceremony, there was still more electricity in the Grande Salle that day than there had been during the previous fortnight in the theatres and hotel suites of the town.

So what happened this year to cause, among many other similar reactions, the trade journal *Variety* to report as its front-page headline, 'Lack Of Zest At Cannes Film Fest'? Explanations given

during the opening days, when officials admitted that registrations were down by 25 per cent against 1980, ranged from the bland to the preposterous, though probably all had some measure of validity.

The good old global recession was trotted out, of course, as was the slump of the film business worldwide. More precisely, blame was put upon the recent fall in value of European currencies against the US dollar, weakening the position of would-be buyers of American product. Festival authorities conceded that the Wednesday opening date, one day earlier

than usual, was an ill-advised innovation; but they were also quick to cite, as conflicting preoccupations for attendees that same week, the presidential election in France, a political referendum in the United States, and the attempted papal assassination in Rome. Gaining by far the most credence, however, was the suspicion that the new American Film Market (AFM), held two months earlier in Los Angeles, had wrought exactly the havoc on Cannes that its instigators in (perhaps calculatedly) unguarded moments had been reported as saying they intended. Certainly it became clear, as the festival wore on, that the froth of promotion which seemed to have evaporated this year was that which in former years had emanated from the so-called American independents—the very companies whose executives created, or were mainstays of, the rival event in California.

The last decade saw Cannes inexorably transformed from an identifiably French

cultural exposition, with some buying and selling on the sidelines, into a frenzied marketplace where many visitors saw the competition and other official categories as quaint side-alleys of limited commercial relevance. The tail, in effect, often threatened to wag the dog. The explosive growth of the business side of the jamboree was attributable in large part to the increased popularity of a technique employed by independent producers to raise finance for a feature film, namely, preselling it territory-by-territory for cash or promissory notes from distributors. Cannes provided an excellent atmosphere for a producer to talk stars and production values, and to close seven-figure deals on future footage over samples of the best cuisine in the world. But by 1980, the more successful such operators could claim that Cannes needed them as much as they needed the festival: they were directly responsible for the huge rise in attendance by multinational buyers, sales agents, publicists and producers, for the money the marketeers poured into the town and the celebrities they flew in. So when the rip-off prices, the insolence of the natives, and the over-bureaucratised yet plainly inefficient organisation finally got to them last year, they sensed they had the clout to defect, and with the more noise the better.

The first AFM was generally held to have been a success. At any rate enough business was done there to encourage distributors who attended from the Far East and Latin America to skip the much longer haul to the South of France two months later. There had been talk of 'terrorist tactics' on the part of AFM organisers, who were rumoured to have elicited undertakings from sponsors of the new market (producers and sales companies were charged a \$15,000 participation fee, though this became negotiable downwards as the start-date approached) that they would boycott Cannes this year. True or not, many in fact turned up; and although Bill Moraskie of Carolco was quoted as saying, 'Assuming there is another AFM, I'm telling you we may just forget about Cannes next year,' the main reason for his and other independents' disaffection appeared to be a growing wariness encountered among non-US buyers towards the whole presales business.

Many a foreign distributor has discovered in recent years to his cost that a glossy brochure promising a high-grade package with box-office names does not necessarily materialise as a playable film. In other words, the presales bubble may be bursting, or at least deflating outside North America, where upfront cash for production can still be raised from television networks and cable companies, and from theatrical exhibitors in the form of guarantees. This is exactly the kind of business that can best be done at an AFM: it does not need Cannes, and finally Cannes does not need it. One way to read the departure of the Yanks and their merchandise is as a simple reflection of the development—or retrenchment—of the industry.

Defying rumours of hard feelings between the organisers of the two events,

Robert Meyers, president of Filmways and leading light of the AFM, put in a well-publicised appearance at Cannes, claiming it had never been his intention to hurt the festival, rather that last year's barrage of complaints had resulted in a marked improvement in its arrangements and general professionalism. This was undoubtedly true. The Cannes authorities, for their part, returned the cordiality with a warm welcome for Meyers and his co-director, Buddy Goldberg. But it was obvious enough that, on a business level, Filmways executives were out to emphasise that Cannes offered them little. Meyers and chairman George Litto stated that most overseas rights on their current product (which included Brian De Palma's *Blow Out*) had been disposed of in Los Angeles: 'We're here to demonstrate our presence, talk some co-productions, and show the new guys around,' said Meyers on the tiny balcony of Litto's bedroom at the Majestic Hotel, which doubled as the company suite. A good deal of their seven-day stay was spent on the tennis courts, until Litto tore a ligament.

Down the hall, in only slightly more opulent premises, another AFM stalwart company, Lorimar, echoed the Filmways attitude. International distribution chief Rolf Mittweg affirmed he had nothing new to announce so soon after the LA market, and revealed a hard-nosed assessment—typical of many US producers—of Cannes and its official workings. 'The authorities here used to complain that we did not spend enough on advertising,' he said, 'but we have been one of the biggest bringers of stars to Cannes. This year Jack Nicholson is the biggest celebrity around [Lorimar's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was screened out of competition]. When Peter Sellers was robbed of a prize last year for *Being There* we said we would enter no more films in competition except perhaps some small artistic picture that needs help.'

Yet while the buying-and-selling furore that Cannes had become was formidably diminished by the first AFM, there were distinct signs—and it was Americans who opined most forcefully to this effect—that for future years this could allow the festival to re-establish, and perfect, its true function as the world's greatest promotion platform for just-completed or

close-to-completion films. 'Cannes should be supported by everyone,' Meyers declared, 'as a festival.' And Mittweg noted: 'It's so tough to do real business here—you can't find anyone.' The climate, the ambience, the whole festive mood are, objectively speaking, conducive to promotion campaigns of the highest calibre; but it has come to be recognised that, for deals, a clearer head is needed. 'Cannes still has panache,' remarked American producer David Brown, partner of Richard Zanuck for *Jaws* among other pictures. 'It suggests the glamour of film. It's an institution. All the journalists are here and you get more attention within a hundred feet of the Carlton—in 60 countries around the world—than you can really count.'

Cannes, in a sense, became a market *faute de mieux*. A quite different animal has since emerged which does the job much better. From tiny beginnings twenty years ago, the autumn MIFED markets in Milan now boast 35 screening rooms, 150 offices with video facilities, plus extensive bars and dining rooms, all under one roof. The regulations expressly inhibit promotion: no posters, for example, may be affixed to the walls of public areas. The atmosphere is clinical, intensive, enervating, but excellent for hard business. The AFM, despite some attempts to infuse traditional Hollywood glamour into the proceedings (mainly for the benefit of wives), is aiming to create much the same milieu. It is MIFED's commissioner-general, M. G. Franci, who is looking to his long-sought laurels in the face of the new American contestant, not Robert Favre Le Bret and Gilles Jacob. The apparent defection from Cannes was misleading. After next year, Meyers plans to shift the AFM from March to the autumn, a blatant challenge to MIFED which one commentator called 'going for the jugular'.

On 1981's evidence of improved administration, Cannes' prospects of consolidating its position as the industry's prime showcase look healthy. In response to last year's fuss, the authorities commissioned a report on the festival's organisation from Michel Bonnet, a former music industry executive who had recently teamed up with Bernard Chevry, creator and doyen of three trade fairs staged at the Palais des Festivals each year, MIP-TV, MIDEM (records and



Nigel Havers and photographers.

music publishing) and Vidcom (video). When Bonnet's recommendations were accepted by the film festival, and then he himself was asked to put them into practice, there was much speculation that Chevy was angling to take over the big event on top of the others. In fact, Bonnet and Chevy parted ways quite soon because, Bonnet said, Chevy wanted to run the festival like the trade fairs—all conceived and organised as markets more on the MIFED pattern—and Bonnet did not want to impose 'badges and a centralised bureaucracy'.

All the same, the 'new look' festival carried many more hallmarks of a professional event than previous circuses: accreditation was more tightly controlled, though for genuine applicants the process was gratifyingly swifter and simpler; and access to competition screenings was more closely policed via a system of colour-coded tickets. One of the reasons the pace seemed slow in the stand areas was that only bona fide card-carriers were admitted to the Palais; the apparent bustle of earlier years was revealed to have been produced largely by ordinary tourists—a buzz of *mouches inutiles*. A few hardened festival-goers grumbled at the unexpected officiousness, but there were only murmurs of approval at Bonnet's success in curbing the all too familiar rip-offs. Some tough talks with the town traders had resulted in agreement among hoteliers to forgo the customary 10 per cent festival surcharge on top of peak-season rates; in an undertaking from taxi drivers to respect an advertised average fare between Cannes and Nice airport (165 francs); and in promises from restaurateurs to offer a *plat du jour* or fixed price menu at all meals.

By next year Bonnet is hopeful that the new Palais, under construction on the site of the old casino, will be at least partly open. He is strongly tipped to succeed Robert Favre Le Bret, now almost 80 years old, as festival president, and has firm hopes of developing Cannes as 'the capital of world cinema'. With the addition of special events to the schedule—forums, *hommages*, focuses on new

styles, new nations—he believes attendance could be as much as doubled, although 'I don't know where they will sleep.' The 1980 influx was estimated at 30,000; this year it was less, but Bonnet maintained that more of them were happier.

The lack of tension (possibly a welcome lack of harassment for many) was eventually reckoned as not specifically the fault of Cannes, but an inevitable aspect of a dramatically changing industry's main manifestation in a stocktaking, watershed year. Of the lack of people, *Variety* summed up the final count as 'volume participation is down but the important people came.' Of the lack of hype, the same paper succinctly assessed the situation as 'leaner, cleaner ... this was the year Cannes got back to basics.' The biggest question mark hung over the lack of significant films. The Cannes selection was widely felt to have brought to a head a fear that has nagged distributors, critics, festival directors and film buffs for the past two years: that, without being unduly melodramatic, there is a world cinema crisis. Economically and artistically—and the two elements are helplessly interlocked in the most expensive art form of all—the state of filmmaking increasingly resembles the catatonic. Any festival of moderate size is bound to reflect that.

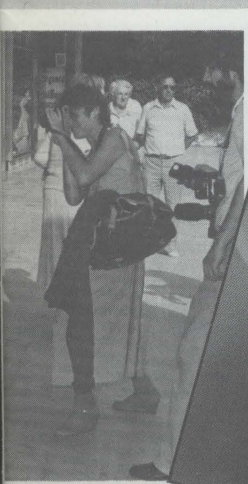
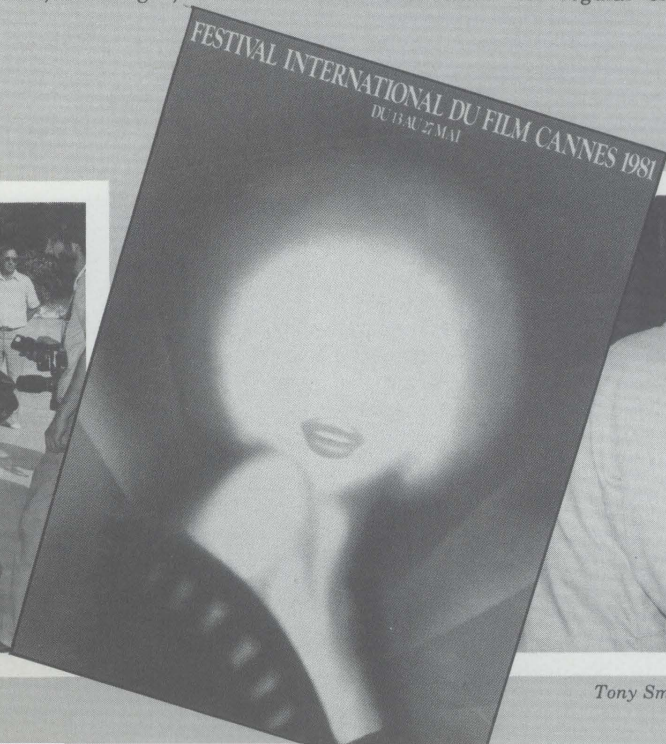
Before examining the hows and whys of the crisis, and its implications for Cannes and other industry gatherings, it is worth a glance at the phenomenon of film festivals itself. In the late 1940s there were only three: Cannes, Venice and an embryonic event at Edinburgh. The National Panel for Film Festivals' 1981 guide lists 270. There is now not a single day in the year when aficionados need contain their lust for new, rare or specialised footage. What is interesting, though not necessarily paradoxical, is that this specific enthusiasm has grown in inverse proportion to the general enthusiasm for regular cinemagoing. It

may well be that the steady decline in cinema admissions since the war has caused a corresponding upsurge of determination to maintain the importance of the art. At the same time, in countries where the cinema survives reasonably well as a popular art and national pastime—obvious examples being France, Italy and Spain—festivals no less abound. So who needs them?

A basic distinction has to be made between the major competitive events and those which act simply as a showcase, whether on an international, national or contextual level. The former are the ones that attract the attention of the trade, since a prize and the accompanying publicity can help a film's box-office prospects. Although distributors nowadays pooch-pooch the pulling power of a 'prizewinner' ribbon stuck across a poster in Britain or the US, there is no argument about the promotion value of a win within the country where a festival is held, since even the big international events retain a chauvinistic character. (Similarly, Americans will claim that an Oscar can add 50 per cent to a film's domestic box-office returns.) A prize at Venice is a seal of approval on Italian distribution; one at Berlin is a definite boost to a German release; and it is no accident that 17 films screened officially at Cannes in 1980 already carried the logo of Gaumont, France's largest distributor.

American producers and the major Hollywood companies tend to be leery of competitions for most of their product, out of a fear that US exhibitors, and audiences, will fight shy of a picture that is branded as an 'art film' by winning an award in a European contest, or by even having been entered for one. Usually only auteurist (or offbeat) American works get offered to festival selectors—*Apocalypse Now*, *All That Jazz* and *The Big Red One* were typical recent examples. The fact remains, however, that a competitive category adds edge to a festival, by inducing attendance by directors and stars, by inviting heavy press coverage and by generally lending an air of purpose that the straightforward cultural compilations can seldom generate to the same extent.

None the less, there is some measure of honour in having a film selected for screening at one of the more prestigious



Tony Smith and Mrs Kawakita.

non-competitive festivals, and possibly some commercial value, too. Inclusion on the bills at London, Sydney and Hong Kong, for instance, can draw handy reviews and lead to pick-ups by local distributors. Even without any material results, most film-makers need feedback about their work, and grasp at the chance to see how a new film plays with an audience (however unrepresentative of the general public), then to discuss it with critics and other professionals in a way that only the festival environment makes possible. Above all, and sometimes alone worth the fare (which few festivals offer to cover), there is the promise of establishing new contacts, nosing out new routes to finance, and keeping an ear to the ground in a business where gossip and hard facts have a tendency to merge.

If festivals can be useful to buyers and sales agents, and helpful to producers and directors, they are the lifeblood of film theorists and academics, film buffs and students, film journalists and critics. It is not uncommon for the commentators to form the discernible core of a festival crowd, while the practitioners look like interlopers. The press in particular are royally treated by any wise festival administration. The prime aim of any festival organiser is to build an identity and reputation for his own event, so that he can achieve more ambitious programmes year by year and swell his resources by attracting more sponsorship—state, municipal or private—and more patronage from ordinary paying devotees.

Since any festival with pretensions to internationality of programming and attendance cannot be staged for much under £100,000 (and some cost far more), the bulk of which goes on accommodating and entertaining overseas directors, actors and other necessary guests, none are self-financing. Press support is essential to their survival, especially now that the calendar is so inordinately packed with events that clashes and overlaps are unavoidable. Festival directors are often forced to fight to keep the dates they want, and their leverage with the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations in Paris, which acts as global watchdog and arbitrator, depends first on gaining official recognition by the body, and then on entrenching a position of real repute. It takes a good many column inches to reach that point.

The revival of Venice three years ago, greeted with glee though it was, has caused much argued scheduling problems. Last year it overlapped with Edinburgh at the end of August, which divided the loyalties of British critics and noticeably deflated the smaller Scottish event in the final days. This year the Paris referees put pressure on Venice to move its start-date back to early September, to avoid conflict with the also competitive Montreal festival. (Edinburgh was drastically shortened, so that problem became immaterial.) At the same time, the Toronto authorities were worried because the later Venice was set, the more it bit into their albeit non-competitive event due to start in the second week of the month. Eventually

the Venetians agreed to leave Montreal clear, but one fixture that suffered a direct hit when Venice returned—and will continue to do so unless it takes evasive action itself—is the festival of American films at Deauville. Another awkward shift occurred in July, when the Pula festival of all-Yugoslav films was moved forward by a week, thus cutting into Moscow's biennial festivities by four days, and just nudging into conflict with Locarno as well. It looked as if the new World Film Festival in Manila might coincide disastrously with the now highly regarded Indian festival, scheduled for New Delhi in January; but the Filipino dates were fortunately changed so that Manila starts the day after India wraps up.

A key factor in the rush and crush of festival inceptions over the past two decades—particularly in the creation of the smaller, local occasions—has been the realisation by municipal authorities and tourist boards that a celluloid bonanza can be a relatively cheap way to attract visitors to a town and afford a community a certain cultural status. Hence the easy proliferation of festivals in picturesque provincial areas, while financial support for those in leading cities generally calls for a more serious, and more political, resolve on the part of national arts institutions.

Politics are endemic to all international festivals, which is as healthy as it is inevitable. When Eastern bloc delegates flounced out of Berlin two years ago in protest at the way *The Deer Hunter* portrayed the Vietnamese, the occurrence prompted complex and important considerations of presumptuous cultural stances—as adopted by either film-makers or film censors, depending on one's persuasion. Ironically, the Berlin festival is one of the more visibly left in tone, mainly because of the International Forum of Young Cinema, separately run alongside the main event with the aim of appealing to a more politically discerning audience, and because of the local critics, who are characterised as 'leftist highbrows'. Four new German films were reportedly held back by their producers from this year's festival and first shown internationally in the Cannes Marché, for fear that the Berlin reviewers would lame their chances in the first heat.

Carlo Lizzani, director of Venice, finds his task increasingly beset by political infighting with and among members of the board of the Biennale, Italy's principal institution controlling the visual, lively and image arts. The new statute renovating the Biennale's cultural activities, including the film festival, created an unwieldy structure of management by committee, with as many politically appointed non-professionals on the board as those with expertise in the entertainment field. Lizzani has been ceded pitifully little authority of his own, and was fully apprised of this year's budget only weeks before the opening. This is particularly galling since, on evidence to date, the event is in danger of suffering from over-popularity and needs decisive handling if the surge of goodwill on the Lido is not to be dissipated in the

scramble for hotel rooms and theatre seats. Typical of the compromised, committee decisions taken by the Biennale was the one over this year's prizes. Lizzani recommended scrapping the three Golden Lions formerly awarded in favour of only one, rightly averring that to give a number of top awards confused the jury and spoiled the cachet of the whole process. The board resolved on giving two.

Besides all the back-scratching by those visitors whose livelihoods depend in one way or another on festival fever maintaining its grip, the disease is also patently reinforced by regular punters who simply enjoy films but find that current commercial release patterns do not deliver enough of what they want to see. Many festivals, too, are geared to specialist interests either in form or content. A number are devoted exclusively to animated films, usually on a biennial basis since cartoons take so long to complete. The most prestigious are at Annecy (France), Ottawa, Zagreb and Varna (Bulgaria). One at Cambridge (England) was recently revived with exiguous resources but promising programming. There are numerous amateur and super-8mm get-togethers and several festivals specifically for commercials.

As for content, children are well catered for with two international festivals in France, one in Adelaide, and a competitive one in Bombay. There is a fairytale film festival every second year in Odense (Denmark), and a new international youth event in Tomar (Portugal). In Giffone Valle Piana, near Salerno (Italy), the annual, rapturously attended festival in August owed its continuation this year to a group of young volunteers who restored the arena after it sustained serious damage in last autumn's earthquake. Substantial moral and financial support was forthcoming from regional government sources, as well as from Germany and Austria.

Avoriaz (France) offers the most coveted trophies for science fiction and fantasy films; Brussels inaugurated the notion of a women's festival. Some events are designed purely as national showcases: Budapest invites buyers and critics once a year to a session of the new Hungarian output; the Nordic Film Festival in Helsinki is a whirl of Scandinavian footage; the Quixote Prize in



Madrid is open only to Spanish language pictures. Science and technology, education, exploration, even religion, are all themes of sufficient interest to justify several days of examination on celluloid. Sofia stages a competitive event each spring called the International Film Festival on Organisation and Automation of Production and Management. No less appropriately located, an International Tourist Film Festival is held every winter in Monte Carlo, and 'Ten Best Of The West' is an amateur round-up in San Diego. Naval films can be contemplated at Cartagena (Spain). But France still stands supreme as the asylum of festival madness: in addition to contests of sailing films at La Rochelle and adventure films at La Plagne, there have now appeared a Dental Film Festival, a Solar Film Festival and a Potholing Film Festival. What next?

The demand is there—to put on movies, to watch them, talk about them, write about them—but where are the films?

Notwithstanding the occasional 'great', few would disagree that the overall standard of features, notably from English-speaking countries, has perceptibly plummeted in the last two or three years. Cinema has arrived at a crossroads. The art is under assault, and the enemy is primarily an economic one.

The roots of the problem lie in the world's largest commercial market, the United States. Changing social patterns—domestic retrenchment, fostered though not actually caused by television—have been responsible for a steady dwindling of cinema audiences. As the market has shrunk, so the competition to reach what remains of it has become ever fiercer, resulting in heavier and heavier reliance on expensive advertising and promotion. Alongside this trend, in the last decade the recession has combined with the fact that fewer films were being made to push up the

cost of production. The American industry has now reached a point where the production cost of the average feature is close to \$10,000,000, and the promotion cost on top of that must be anticipated as about the same. To recoup those amounts, a film must take at least \$50,000,000 at the box-office. A quick check of *Variety's* chart of top-grossing titles reveals how few achieve it. The odd low-cost picture may take off at home or abroad, but broadly speaking the US cinema business no longer makes sense.

What is happening, of course, is that theatrical income is accounting for a reduced proportion of an average film's earnings. Provided that casting and content are right (and there's a rub-and-a-half), a sale to network television can pay back more than half the production cost and entails no promotion cost whatever. Cable television systems are gaining audiences and paying more handsomely for product by the week. And although the figures are small as yet, the potential yield of the emergent videogram market is very much a part of producers' thinking. So the small screen is keeping the big screen alive; but the question is, at what price?

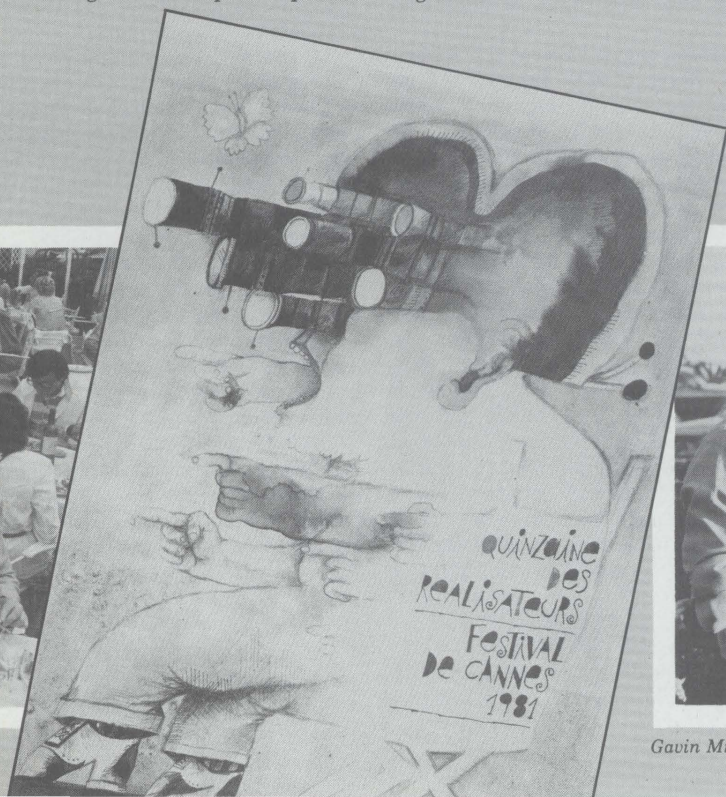
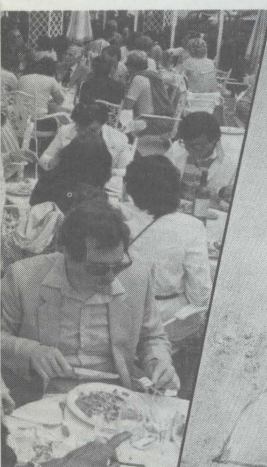
Artistically, television values are different from cinema values. The small screen can really only convey one piece of visual information at a time, preferably one which occupies a substantial area of the frame; complex compositions tend to befuddle the watcher's eye. To sustain its impact, television is best used as a reportage medium, supplying single, strong images in a sequence that equates with verbal exposition. Hence the preference of tv drama for close-ups, for controlling narrative pace by cutting rather than by movement within a shot, and for ample dialogue. The *mise en scène* of cinema works quite differently. Classically, its impact derives from its ability to fill the watcher's entire vision with images, stimulating precisely and profoundly his non-verbal senses.

Naturally the distinction can be challenged as a hard and fast one: memories

immediately spring to mind of wonderful wordy movies, as do ravishing shots from tv films. The popularity of feature films shown on television might seem to suggest that the public do not care much in any case, but many ordinary viewers will concede that the experience is often a significantly diminished one. (The films that seem to suffer least are those Hollywood studio comedies and thrillers which predated television drama and were made on very much the same limited scale—except that the scripts were more sparky.) In parallel, by a kind of reverse osmosis, a number of extremely popular recent features could fairly be described as television fare made to big-screen technical standards: *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Ordinary People* are examples. There is admittedly a danger that over-insistence on the purity of the cinema art will recall the old coterie criticism joke, 'Nobody liked it except the audience.' None the less, the growing interdependence of film-makers and television—the latter's voracious appetite for product, the former's need to feed that appetite to get feature films made at all—may be subtly leading the film-makers' imaginative capacities away from the basic principles of cinema craftsmanship.

A US network tv sale, or the hope of one, imposes certain tangible restrictions which can hamper a film's artistic integrity—the demands for commercially acceptable star names and for compliance with the broadcasting code of acceptable material being but two. But there is a more sinister aspect—a sort of Catch-22—to the apparent lifeline supplied by television exhibition to the struggling features industry. Network and cable companies will pay high prices for films that succeed theatrically, but far less for flops. In effect, they look to the theatrical distributor to stand the cost of a lavish launch as a condition of offering a decent price. A heavily promoted picture can still fail at the box-office, of course, but generally the pattern is that successful films become doubly so, while the ones that just fail to work in the cinemas make peanuts twice over.

The situation is symptomatic of the US industry's gravest trouble—the polarisation of the market, the all-or-virtually-nothing prospect facing every film. Costly promotion techniques devised to combat



Gavin Millar and Lynda Myles.

the low level of admissions are reserved for only those films that are judged to be low-risk ventures, and effectively suppress those with minority audience appeal. 'Art films' may get shown in the US, but they are unlikely to make back much more than the cost of prints and advertising. There are exceptions: *La Cage aux Folles* broke through the foreign language barrier, as did *Cousin Cousine* before it. But by and large it is only exploitation pictures, now reaching a zenith (or nadir) of gory explicitness, that have found a way of combining cheapness of production with steady access to a known market. For the rest, there is no longer a market that any other kind of businessman would recognise—merely a jackpot with long odds.

As their own backyards contracted, the Hollywood companies foraged all the more energetically abroad to sell their pictures, with gradual success. America's cultural imperialism has been felt, and yielded to, in almost every Western country and limitedly in Eastern Europe: audiences everywhere want to see American films. In the last few years, statistics for France and Italy, the two countries where indigenous pictures still count among the highest admissions, have started to show that even there the profits from local product are suffering from the transatlantic competition.

Once a country is left—as Britain has long been—with only a small slice of its own market for its own films, its producers have to look to an international market to show a proper return and stay in business. Apart from the rather dismal prospect implicit in this of a world watching only American-style films, it would not be such a bad thing if more producers could do it successfully or with some degree of artistic integrity. The state of the British industry is sorry proof that it too often results in loss of continuity in local production, and consequent draining away of creative and financial confidence. In short, very few good pictures. State funding of production houses such as exists within the Soviet bloc tends to go hand-in-hand with repressive cultural control, though it is notable that Poland and Hungary turn out several fine features every year. The big success story would appear to be Australia, now further boosted by a tax-incentive scheme that could unleash millions. Amid the optimism, however, it must be remembered that almost none of the new Australian cinema output has recouped its costs.

The global scene would be brighter if only the ubiquitous American cinema had continued to match its promotion with more significant films. But there has been no escaping the increasing number of ill-conceived or botched projects to emerge from Hollywood in the last couple of years. It could be, as Pauline Kael has suggested, that the new breed of studio executives simply do not have the mental equipment to pick film projects and steer them judiciously through the production process. It could be, as suggested here, that financial pressures have finally overpowered film-makers' imaginations, and they just don't dream them like they used to anymore.

Whatever the justification or otherwise for such mournful musings, Cannes and most of the other film festivities are bound to carry on unspooling for some years yet. Nor is the longterm forecast necessarily gloomy. If the crisis is largely brought about by the collapse of theatrical exhibition as the industry's mainstay before the newer media have become properly established (currently small-screen, but how far away is the large-screen domestic facility?), then out of it may come a beneficial revolution. The new technology will make film distribution infinitely less expensive, for a start. That alone could make much more sense of the industry's economics. Artistically, what the new media will spawn is literally anyone's guess. But whatever the product looks like, it is fair to predict that the Côte d'Azur will remain the prime place to shout about it.

How it will actually be traded is less safe to assume. Already videocassettes are compact enough to be mailed at minimal expense, often saving buyers costly and exhausting air-miles. They may never have to leave their offices if product on offer can be beamed to them via satellite. All the same, salesmen agree that there is no substitute for personal contact in business relationships, and the charm of organised marketplaces is unlikely to fade, although there will doubtless be much jockeying for recognition before a firm calendar transpires. The new London Multi-Media Market, planned for September 1982, marks a courageous resolve in an acutely recessionary time and place to draw the various threads of audiovisual entertainment together for the common good, in a way that is hopefully prophetic and not pie-in-the-sky. If the event survives, it is sure to change its shape and emphasis many times over the next decade, but it will always have been the first. Reactions to it volunteered by overseas film traders so far have mostly been cautiously optimistic about its value as a video fair, tinged with some pessimism about Britain's high costs and the threat of industrial disputes.

The eventual importance of the American Film Market will depend on its ability to become a genuinely international event in terms of product. At present many producers in Europe and Australia view it as an essentially parochial affair designed to shift local independents' wares. Furthermore, Meyers and his colleagues have had no success to date in persuading the major Hollywood companies to participate. Meanwhile one development particularly evident at Cannes this year was a sudden new flexibility on the part of the majors in picking up independently made pictures for distribution. All except Universal were unprecedentedly pitching to acquire rights on a territory-by-territory basis, when their stance hitherto has been always to pursue acquisitions for the US, for the rest of the world as one lump, or both, or not at all. They were also prepared to forgo their normal practice—much hated by independent producers—of cross-collateralising returns, that is, setting gains in one territory against

losses in another. The majors were thus offering services as sales agents, in effect, but agents with an unbeatable purchase on the market. The development added to a general impression that the majors were expanding their influence at Cannes to fill the vacuum left by the AFM defectors.

The festival, with its irrepressibly nationalistic competition (despite Gilles Jacob's periodic protestations that it should not be equated with the Olympics), continues unsurpassed as a launchpad for emergent national cinemas. In the mid-1970s Australia proved that Cannes could be the gateway to an unsuspecting world. This year New Zealand cut a dash for the first time with four indigenous features; Iraq surprised a good many visitors by taking key poster sites in the Carlton for a picture called *Al Qadisiyya*; and a Libyan delegation arrived for the first time ever, with hefty promotion for *Battle of Taghrit*.

At the end of the day, what does it all cost, and is it worth it? Estimates proffered this year, on and off the record, varied so dramatically that the truth remains as hazy as the start-date of *Superman III*—though naturally the banners trailing behind planes which flew over the beaches every lunchtime proclaimed it as 'Now In Production'. (That was at least less desperate than a banner announcing 'The Remake Of The Year', but not as comical as the one which ran, 'Advertise Your Last Movie'.) One producer of a strongly promoted, non-competing film priced the festival exercise at £50,000. His co-producer stated separately that anyone who spent more than £10,000 was foolish; including bringing in celebrities and giving a massive lunch party, he said, the trip cost £7,500, 'but of course you tell people there's £100,000 behind the picture.' David Puttnam recalled putting up his own posters for *Bugsy Malone* with director Alan Parker and spending no more than £2,000 on their fares, accommodation and obligatory entertainment. But he guessed that Twentieth Century-Fox put up £35,000 or so this year for *Chariots of Fire*.

'If you are not equipped to present your product properly, you should not be in the business,' remarked Pedro Teitelbaum, head of Filmcrest International, the distribution company handling *Gandhi* and one other feature. He was making no deals, he claimed, until the pictures were finished—just talking. Ensconced in a vast suite at the Majestic Hotel, he professed that to do Cannes in style cost at least \$350,000. Was it worth it? 'We shall see,' he said. Also living it up was a young American film student on a tour of European festivals. He was gate-crashing almost all the parties, 'especially the ones with food,' and attending every invitation only screening by going to the movie shown immediately before in the same theatre and hiding in the lavatory during the break. His budget for the trip? \$200. He reckoned he was getting value for money. ■

I am indebted to Christian Routh of the National Panel for Film Festivals for information included here.

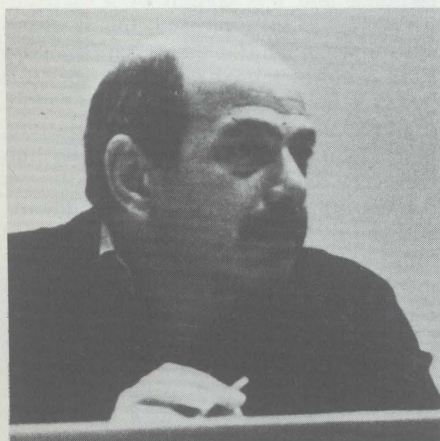
LONDON 25

The 1981 London Film Festival, from 3 to 22 November, will be the twenty-fifth. Ken Wlaschin has been director of the festival since 1970. Richard Roud, festival director throughout the 1960s, went on to organise the New York Film Festival. (Both, incidentally, are Americans.) Leslie Hardcastle, Controller of the National Film Theatre, was appointed General Manager in 1959 and was assistant manager at the time of the first festival in 1957.

Here, in interviews with Penelope Houston and John Pym, Richard Roud and Ken Wlaschin discuss the history and purposes of the festivals they direct.



LONDON AND NEW YORK Richard Roud



From the start, the London Film Festival was lucky. It began just before there was the great outburst of new films, film schools, film groups all over the world—not just in France with the New Wave, but generally. The first festival took place in 1957, and by '59 the whole thing was building up. There was a real revival after the general dullness of the 50s, and certainly in its first ten years the festival benefited greatly from that upsurge in film-making and in interest in cinema.

At the beginning the London festival was a very pragmatic business: in so far as there was a brief for the organisers, it was simply that it should be a 'Festival of Festivals', with the idea of bringing to London films from other festivals which people would not otherwise get a chance to see. I had nothing to do with the first festival, which was organised by Derek Prouse. I think they showed about sixteen films. Then David Robinson put together the second one, which was already a bit bigger. In 1959 there was no single organiser: it was rather a combined effort. I remember that my own first task for the festival, that year, was to look after Truffaut, who was in London for the first time with *Les quatre cents coups*. I was put in charge of the 1960 festival, and that was something of a communal effort. Films were suggested by all sorts of people. James Quinn, who was then director of the BFI, brought *Rocco and His Brothers* from Venice. I

remember going over to Paris to see *Shoot the Pianist*. Most of the films that year came from Cannes. *Moderato Cantabile* came from Cannes; *L'Avventura*, *The Young One*, *Los Golfos*, *Virgin Spring* and *The Lady with the Little Dog*. Not a bad festival. And Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes*, two Hungarian films, and a film by de Broca, who didn't turn out to be much, but still. The first complete screening of *La Règle du Jeu*, the reconstructed version. No, it wasn't bad...

Things were far easier in those days. In New York now we show fewer films than London, only about twenty, and we feel that we are just about getting enough. But in the old days you could afford to be very choosy: this film or that wasn't quite good enough. There was never any question of representation by countries, no United Nations business. If towards the end there was a choice to be made between two particular films, then perhaps the edge might go to one from a country not already represented, but that was all. Also, it wasn't true that we showed mainly French films; the trouble was that the French films were the most popular ones, the most widely talked about, so some people got that notion. It's as false as the idea that you could never get into the NFT or the London Film Festival. You couldn't get in for certain films, admittedly, but there were always some seats, even though houses

were probably fuller in the early days, when there was only one cinema.

In those days we used to add extra screenings as the films sold out. Then there could be trouble because a distributor would allow you only one screening, for fear that too many people would see the film before he put it on commercially. That was why, when I got to New York and a much larger cinema, I made sure that every film was shown only once. If they were all treated the same way, that was that. There was no question of adding or subtracting screenings, which gave too much leeway for bargaining and hanky-panky. But in the early days in London we sometimes had as many as five screenings of a popular film. Of course part of the point of the festival was to show films that wouldn't otherwise be opening in London, and to attract distributor interest. We felt it was taking far too long for many important European films to reach Britain—something which hasn't improved all that much over the years. Some potential distributors would wait for the festival: it gave them a chance to see the film they were interested in with a British audience, albeit a select one, and to find out what the reviewers were going to say. Also, there are always certain films which are taken by a distributor only *after* it is known that they will be in the festival. This has been true both of London and New York.

What is a festival for, anyhow? Is it run for the benefit of the audience, or for the film-makers and the industry, or to help distributors, or for the prestige of the organisation that sponsors it? As far as I am concerned, it is for the audience and for the people who make the films. It's not enough if 500 people or 1,500 people see a film. I think one only feels really justified when the film goes on to achieve wider distribution.

At the outset, the films were what I chose or what people recommended to me—Tom Milne, John Gillett, or of course, James Quinn. I didn't see all the films beforehand; I was too new at the game. If a distributor came by and told me he had the new Visconti film, say, one couldn't very well insist on seeing it first. I wasn't in that position, and also it didn't seem necessary. There was no programme committee. In fact, for quite a while the programme planning staff was me, Pamela Balfry, who is now a partner in the Artificial Eye company, and a shorthand typist. The whole BFI was so small then that everyone more or less took a hand. Remember those famous festival booking weekends, when just about anyone from the Institute used to come in and help with the forms? The Institute may have wanted the festival as something rather spectacular, to celebrate the launching of the new NFT in 1957, but it never had the money to do anything in a big way.

One limitation on London is that it was, and remains, so largely a festival for BFI members. Another is the size of the theatres—they're really quite small. And also their location, rather inconveniently tucked away under Waterloo Bridge, which seems to me to have become more rather than less of a drawback. But the

main thing then was always to get the thing on, to get it sold out, and to make sure that people were reasonably happy with what they saw. I don't think we worried too much about creating a festival atmosphere—though we did try. In any case, the difference between London and other festivals, like Cannes and Venice, is that they are professional junkets, congresses, trade fairs, conventions. Very few non-professionals get to those festivals, they are concentrated occasions for the industry and the film press.

New York is public, and it has more visibility. Because the festival takes place at Lincoln Center, it was from the first day an important event in the city's life. In the days when there were many more New York papers, every paper reviewed the festival daily. Some reviewed every single film, which is something that never happened in London. The fact that the festival took place in a larger cinema, that it had the prestige of Lincoln Center, that it wasn't part of an all the

'You think you know
what the good films
are, but do you?
Perhaps the good films
are the other ones.'

year round operation, that it wasn't under a bridge but in the centre of town, has meant that from the outset it has had more influence on what films get bought and seen than the London festival. This has made it more exciting—and more difficult. All eyes are upon you, whereas in London there was never that kind of public exposure or pressure. The difference is that *anything* that happens at Lincoln Center is considered a media event, whereas for years you had to explain to a taxi driver where the National Film Theatre was. Not any more, but for years you had to. Cities are different, and perhaps the way things are is also the only way the festival could work in London. They *could* have made it more public, found a less eccentric location for it, but that's not the Institute's way of doing things. There were even moves to have an English Cannes at somewhere like Brighton, but that never got anywhere.

In fact, the New York festival came into existence as a direct result of the LFF. In 1962, an American composer called Dr William Schuman had taken over at Lincoln Center. A friend of mine, the *New York Times* critic Eugene Archer, asked why there was no provision at the Center for film, as one of the performing arts. Dr Schuman said that he was interested but didn't know where to start, and Eugene Archer suggested that he might do worse than try to imitate the LFF. So, after some letters to

and fro, Dr Schuman appeared in London in the autumn of 1962 and went to see James Quinn. It was on a Saturday, and I remember that we met at Wheeler's, in Old Compton Street. Schuman was keen not to do something *like* the London festival but to do the London festival. One thing I discovered during lunch is that New Yorkers resent English people programming their festivals. 'Where do you come from?' Schuman asked. I told him. 'You're American, ohh!' It was decided there and then—almost. And James Quinn went to New York, and it was agreed that the festivals should be twinned.

This lasted until 1967, when Stanley Reed, who had succeeded James Quinn as BFI director, had reservations about the way things were working out. In the first five years, London and New York showed more or less the same films. I was the 'co-ordinator'. The fascinating thing was to see how audiences differed. Ozu's *Autumn Afternoon*, for instance, was very badly received in New York: Japanese soap opera, people called it. In London, they had already seen Ozu films, they could see beyond the soap opera plot. *Muriel* did just as badly in New York as in London. *Hallelujah the Hills* went down much better in New York. The Munk film *Passenger* did better in London; the New York audience couldn't see the point of showing an unfinished film.

The main difference was in public attitudes, and particularly press attitudes. In London in the early days one didn't feel there was any press opposition to the festival; they just tended to ignore it. Lincoln Center was too big to ignore, so you had to take a stand for or against it. For quite a while *Variety* was almost our only supporter, though they changed their minds later. I remember Judith Crist saying that New York needed the festival like it needed more traffic. The critics didn't want to have to see all those movies: twenty films in two weeks, God, all that work. They didn't see the need for a festival, because they felt that if a film was any good it would always find a distributor. Which of course is not true. Altogether, it was extremely controversial.

It wasn't until I got to New York, in fact, that I realised how much attention *could* be paid to a festival. It was exciting in London when a film you particularly liked was put on, got a good audience response and was bought by a distributor. One was very pleased, but it didn't matter too much if it didn't happen. New York could be more exciting. In 1964, for instance, we showed Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution*. In London, nothing much happened. In New York, the film had a good review in the *Times*, it was bought almost instantly, and suddenly, overnight, Bertolucci was made. The only film I can remember creating that excitement in the early days in London was *L'Avventura*, and that already had its reputation from Cannes. Other films from those days? *Il Posto* came virtually out of the blue. I had to fight with the producers, who said it was a specifically Milanese film, and that no one else could



Lincoln Center lit up for the New York film festival.

understand it. I had to argue at length that anyone who had worked in an office, anywhere, could understand it. I think that Pasolini's reputation with English-speaking audiences was made via festival screenings; and the reputation of Milos Forman's early films, *Peter and Paula* and so on.

Critical reaction has always been more important in New York. Perhaps one reason the New York critics are more influential is because there are fewer of them—and fewer now than in the early days, since we've lost five papers in New York since the early 60s. But one of the points about keeping a festival small, and one reason why New York is still small, is to allow the reviewers to see everything. In London now, it's literally impossible to see, much less review, ninety films in two weeks. In the old days, you could see almost everything. Reviews are certainly important to the film-makers as well as to audiences, and producers and distributors would be less likely to give us the films if they didn't think they were going to be reviewed.

Perhaps I ought to mention that there are other, less publicised advantages for them in a festival screening. It costs a great deal of money to launch a film in New York and a festival showing can reduce some of that cost. For instance, a *New York Times* advertisement actually cost less if a film had been in the festival because when it opened later it was considered second run. A strange anomaly; they may have stopped it by now. For another thing, a festival press show means that you don't have to hire screening rooms. In New York, they have individual screenings for individual critics. It's just not done, for instance, to have Pauline Kael and Vincent Canby at the same screening. It's mad, but they do cater to them madly.

In the early days, of course, there were great problems about getting American films for the London festival. You couldn't expect the major Hollywood pictures, only smaller movies like *Studs Lonigan* or *Too Late Blues* which the distributors thought were 'difficult'. In New York the problem has not been so

bad. Most of the major companies have in fact been co-operative, though not necessarily all at the same time. For a couple of years Columbia was very interested in the festival; then Paramount gave us support. It keeps changing. Universal was the one company that would never give a film to the festival until last year, when we got *Melvin and Howard* because the producer, Verna Field, believed in the festival.

Some people have never seen much point in the New York festival using screening time on Hollywood movies, since audiences will have no problems about seeing them in the normal course of events. But there are advantages, apart from the fact that it makes people happy to feel that the American cinema is represented at an American festival. One practical benefit is that when you ask for a film for the festival, some high-powered foreign producers almost immediately ask what American films you have. They think that if there are Hollywood films they are in good company. Another advantage, particularly important in New York, is that you get decent projection in the proper ratio. We showed *Mean Streets*, the world premiere, and it was nice to show Scorsese's first feature after programming his shorts. We were very pleased to show *Badlands*. I don't know what Warners would have done with it. As things turned out, it didn't do well commercially anywhere, but perhaps without a festival screening it might not have come out so soon. Our showing certainly got *Melvin and Howard* a quicker opening: the exhibitors had not been very interested, and Universal were prepared to keep it on the shelf. When we showed *Kid Blue*, James Frawley said that audiences had reacted just as he had intended, and that whatever happened to the film afterwards that kind of experience made it worthwhile. Are screenings like that an advantage to the festival or to the film-makers? Perhaps that's a false distinction.

In recent years, London has gone one way and New York the other. The London festival has expanded to a point where it's hardly possible for any one

person to get an idea of the festival as a whole. It's strange, in fact, that so many festivals have gone in for showing more and more films at a time when the overall number of good films is certainly not increasing. They think they can make up in quantity what they lose in quality, which is debatable. Or they think it is elitist to talk about 'good films' at all. You think you know what the good films are, but do you? Perhaps the good films are the other ones. Our New York programme committee thinks it knows what the good films are, but then it's elitist. So what is London: permissive... omnivorous... non-normative, perhaps? Cannes went the same proliferating way in an effort first to placate and then to swallow up the opposition, but in London no one ever suggested starting an alternative festival in Battersea... Oh yes, in 1968 there was an alternative screening of *One Plus One* outside the NFT. It was run by a group who put the film on in a sort of tent; their generator didn't work so they had to plug it in to the NFT supply. That could only have happened in London.

The London festival has so many different categories now. In fact, there might be more justification for this diversification in New York, where apart from the Museum of Modern Art, whose screenings are mostly during the daytime, there is nothing to compare with the NFT seasons running through the year, often showing the same kind of films that are presented in the festival. But there is a real difference between the two situations. London is not a great movie town, and the United Kingdom is not a great film market. North America, after all, represents half the world market, while Britain is only four per cent. New York is influential because most of the distributors are there, because a festival showing can lead to a film being bought, and because there is still an American market outside New York itself. Not everywhere, but in key cities. Sadly, that is no longer true of Britain.

Through the 60s, the New York festival was expanding. Unlike London in the early days, when there was no money at all, there seemed to be almost unlimited cash. There were all sorts of adjuncts, extras, free things. Then in 1970 the money ran out and the festival very nearly went under. It had been taken over by the Film Society of Lincoln Center in 1968, instead of being run by Lincoln Center itself, and from 1971 the programme was cut back to below its present size. The budget is now about \$200,000, but it would be difficult to make valid comparisons with costs in London. For instance, something like a quarter of the budget goes on rent for the hall. There are stage hands to be paid. Every time anyone uses a microphone on stage, it's two four-hour calls, one man to bring the microphone out and one to turn on the switch. And there are the advertising costs, like a full page in the *New York Times* (in the old days it was a double page), which now costs over \$40,000.

We could get the costs back from higher ticket prices, but we want people

to be able to afford the festival—the festival as a whole, not just one or two films. Seats used to be cheaper than the regular New York cinemas; now the price is about the same, which is still cheaper than London West End cinemas. So we raise about \$100,000 from ticket sales, and for the rest we depend on fund-raising and grants.

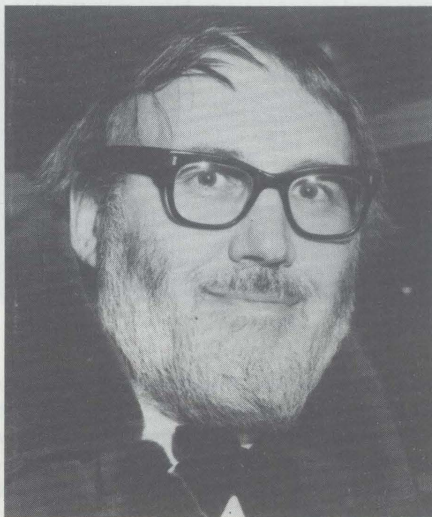
There doesn't seem to have been much change in the type of people who make up the audience, except perhaps in one respect. No one would bother to go to the festival now for the sake of seeing uncensored films, or sexy films, as they certainly did in the 60s. It's a much more mixed audience than the London one, from the furcoat ladies to the jeans crowd, and it reacts rather differently. When a film goes well, it's more exciting. When it goes badly, it's a disaster. People feel they've been cheated and stomp out in fury, whereas the NFT crowd ... they know what they've come to see, they know what they're in for. Saturday night in New York always has to be an easy film, for an audience who want to have fun. The more experimental films go on during the week, and you try to signal them in the blurbs. There was a rather good piece by Morris Dickstein in the *Bennington Review*, in which he makes fun of the blurbs' basic honesty: 'the film may seem slow, but ...' or 'in other hands than Kurosawa's this would be sentimental.' But there is no sense in getting the wrong audience for a film, and I feel you have to let them know, guardedly, what to expect. For Duras and the Straubs the blurb may end up saying 'its rewards are commensurate with its demands.' The warning is in there somewhere, and I think that over the years people have come to read them carefully.

Attitudes do change. Before the 1980 festival, Vincent Canby wrote a piece in which he mentioned past festival films which he had thought were endlessly long and boring, like Jancsó's *Red Psalm* (which is actually only 85 minutes) and Marguerite Duras' *Nathalie Granger*. He added that in view of the junk he had to see all that year, he would really be very grateful to see something like that now, whatever he might have thought of the films at the time. All the same, you have to get the notion across to the film-makers that you can only help films which are helpable. Some film-makers have the idea that if a film is in the festival it will be a success—like the other ones. But putting a film in a festival isn't going to make people love it.

So where do we go now? New York could always, I suppose, founder for lack of money, as it nearly did ten years ago. London is more solidly based on the National Film Theatre. But we have to reckon that soon everything is going to be on cassette or disc, and it is no longer going to be simply a matter of showing films, but of showing the best print in the best possible way. It is going to be like hardback and paperback. Paperbacks will be the cassettes. But there will always be people who will want to see the film properly: the festivals will be for them, and their policies will be more selective as a result. □

LONDON

Ken Wlaschin



1981 will be my twelfth festival. I came to the British Film Institute from London Weekend Television, where I was a story editor—it was like Channel Four, when it dawned it was going to be a glorious new thing. Before that I was a diary writer on the *Daily Sketch* and a freelance journalist, and I had worked on the Rome *Daily American* and as a teacher in Italy. When I took over, I modelled the festival on the way Richard Roud had done it, which seemed to me excellent, and that first year I was careful to ensure that all the films jumped over the wire of some quality criteria. But that also seemed limiting: we were then showing only 27 films, and a great deal was beginning to happen, especially in Third World cinema, which that style of festival was unable to reflect.

In 1970 NFT2 opened, a 160-seater cinema, and that meant we could put on films of minority interest without having to worry too much about attracting large audiences. It made it easier for us to expand the festival. The New York Film Festival, by contrast, has such a large hall that even Richard's favourite Straub is a worry for him: he knows that 300 people are likely to come and he needs 1,800. With two small cinemas, we can afford to be more flexible.

Our first addition was a New Directors section. We wanted to spotlight film-makers who would obviously have to be reckoned with in the future. I remember we showed Daryush Mehrjui's *The Cow* in the first year, and Angelopoulos' first film in the second. Because of the stress then on what was happening in the short film field, we had programmes drawn from the major shorts festivals, Oberhausen, Cracow, Annecy. But interest receded to the point where it was not worth the expense, and we now programme the best shorts in other ways. Later, we added sections on documentaries, independent British cinema, the action film (horrors and thrillers), none of which would have fitted the festival's previous structure. It's important both for the organisers and for audiences to keep the festival alive by ringing the changes, spotlighting different areas of cinema as they begin to look exciting.

The festival attracts more attention for specific films and their directors than an ordinary NFT season; more people make an effort to see unknown films, and there are more people from the distribution/exhibition side to look at them. One of the first films in our 'Action' category, for instance, was John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13*, which had failed in the United States, and through our screening he met the man who financed *Halloween*. His career took off. I regret we didn't help Carpenter earlier. We wanted to show *Dark Star*, his first feature, but it went to Edinburgh and then into some small programme at the Other Cinema in London. It was more or less lost and only brought back after the success of *Assault*. Had *Dark Star* been at the London festival we might have boosted it a bit, though you never know.

Between 1968 and 1970, other major festivals—Cannes, Berlin, Venice—all felt that things were happening which



could not be fitted into the events they had been organising. Cannes responded with the Quinzaine and Berlin with the Young Forum. Since we are confined to one building with two cinemas, we are not in a position to have two or three alternative festivals, so our growth has been much more restricted. Cannes now has 600 films, and Berlin about 400. We have about 90 spread over a slightly longer period, 17 or 18 days. If you really wanted, you *could* see everything. There are usually only four films a day, and that is a light load for professional moviegoers, compared with Berlin or Cannes.

Another reason for the growth of festivals was, of course, the splintering of audience interest. World cinema has expanded in the 70s, all sorts of new countries are making films, and in effect you now have not one audience but a whole series of minority audiences. At his John Player lecture in 1970, Satyajit Ray spoke of the 50s and early 60s: he had a group of friends, and if one of them told the others that they were really going to like a film, they would all go and they would all like it. That is no longer true. Now there will be ten different opinions about a film, and you can no longer reckon that everyone interested in cinema will want to see the same movies.

If a movement in cinema is developing somewhere in the world, you can either mount an NFT season or, if the films are of sufficient quality, spotlight them within the festival and perhaps bring over the directors. Our 'American Independents' section was most successful, partly because it gave the film-makers, who came from all over the United States, a chance to meet each other. I wanted to repeat this in 1981 with the black independent American film-makers, but the films themselves were not really of quite the quality to put into the festival, and instead there will be a season of them at the NFT next February. They are exceptionally interesting, but I think festival audiences might be disappointed by some of them. The audience expects a certain quality, although of course this expectation varies from an experimental film, to a new director's film, to a film by Fellini.

Like the audience for cinema in general, ours has always been a predominantly young audience: the under-30s go to the movies. I believe, however, that we have attracted new audiences by showing new kinds of films. We have helped people see the action pictures, for example, in a festival light. As a spillover, perhaps they will become interested in other films. And we have probably attracted people who are not BFI members, although it's hard to tell. Smart people take out a monthly or a full year's membership and buy much cheaper tickets. But effectively the festival is completely open: a BFI member has only the advantage of priority booking, and usually no more than about 20 films out of 90 are sold out before booking opens to the public.

What is a film festival for? The basic point of any festival is to let those concerned with the cinema—distributors,

buyers, audiences, critics—find out what is happening in the world. To make them aware of developing patterns or new waves. To let them talk to the film-makers. The distributor wants to check the audience reaction, to gauge whether he can make money from a film. The critic wants to discover the response of a British audience to a film he thought wonderful at Taormina. Everybody may disagree with him. The audience is interested in the latest work of a favourite director. Some people are interested in films for promoting ideas.

You suggest that a basic difference between London and, say, Cannes is that London is for Londoners and that few people—who are just people—go to the festivals which are run for film professionals. But it's worth pointing out that the number of overseas visitors coming to London is growing. Another of the changes of the 70s. Many journalists would not go to Berlin or Venice unless their hotels were paid for, but they come

'If there was a new Buñuel film and everyone said it was his worst film, I think I would still programme it.'

here, even though we offer journalists no hospitality, because of the spread of films that we show. The directors of a number of other major festivals now make a point of coming. I don't, in fact, distinguish between professional and non-professional audiences: an 'ordinary' filmgoer does not come to see art films anyway.

It takes time, but eventually at least half the films shown at the festival find a British distributor. It is part of our promotional aspect to help films find a wider audience, and we sometimes bring back films which have not entered distribution. The BFI Award may go to a film, like Bresson's *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, which takes years to open commercially. In view of Britain's dwindling movie market, has the impact of a festival showing for a film diminished? Yes and no. Distributors are increasingly interested in having films in the festival which they are considering or, in some cases, which they have already acquired. When we had 27 films in the festival, I believe about the same proportion found a distributor. We usually go into the festival with some 15 films already acquired.

When it did not do well in the States, United Artists shelved Joan Micklin Silver's *Head Over Heels*. They did not want it shown at the festival, and we had to work and persuade. It was eventually shown, to acclaim, and then picked up by the Screen on the Hill in Hampstead. The director is happy, the company is

reasonably happy (they made a little money), Romaine Hart of the Screen is happy. I believe we are doing our job that way. We helped Bill Forsyth by showing his first small-budget feature *That Sinking Feeling*. It caught the eye of the producers who financed his second film. We put this on; it has become one of the Screen's biggest successes; it has gone to Taormina in competition.

A touring festival? We have, in a sense, moved towards this. For the past four years, we have assisted the Dublin festival with 15 to 20 films, and last year we helped the first Tyneside festival. Since this is the LFF's 25th anniversary, we are trying to organise two or three packages of six films each which will tour perhaps ten regional film theatres. This was tried in the early 70s, when George Hoellering of the Academy bought 12 excellent but not highly commercial films which after the festival were offered to the regions. They went to several places, but they did not do very well, probably because they had not had London openings and they had not been written about.

From the festival's point of view, the press notices are most important for films by unknown directors from unknown countries, and the major value of the press is in helping producers and directors with their films. A good review can help immensely. There is, however, a marked difference between the British press and that of most other countries, especially France, Germany, Italy and the United States. Every day during Cannes, every major Italian newspaper, for instance, devotes a half page to the films shown in competition the day before. In Britain, the dailies will have one piece a week, maybe two. And how many of the 600 films at Cannes ever get mentioned? It is difficult to explain, especially to the Americans, that if they get a paragraph in *The Times* they should feel lucky.

The choice of films for the festival is mine; Stanley Reed, who put me in charge, disliked committees and bureaucratic decisions. For the first two years, I tried to see everything personally. But it is limiting. I cannot go to Hong Kong to see the new Hong Kong masterpiece. Tony Rayns, who works for the Hong Kong festival, is there for three months of the year and if he says a film is outstanding, and if others concur, then we will programme it. I have still, however, seen about 80 per cent of the films in advance of the festival. I always find more than one opinion on the films I have not seen. There could be exceptions. If there was a new Buñuel film and everyone in the world said it was his worst film, I think I would still programme it. I believe that Buñuel is one of the eight or nine pre-eminent directors, and that even if he made a bad film you probably should show it. Though I don't believe he could make a bad film.

It is pleasant to have an international spread. John Gillett, the Institute's research officer, supplies me with lists. 'Algeria has these films of possible interest.' Other lists come in. We have unpaid overseas advisers. You look through the lists and find that such-and-such seems

to be the most interesting Scandinavian film of the year. But then you have to ask yourself whether it merits inclusion, in view of the fact that Norway, Denmark and Sweden are not making very interesting films at present. I think most Scandinavians would agree with that. To present a film from Denmark simply because you have not otherwise got a Danish film is not, I believe, a very good idea. There is no weighting. We don't have to have ten films from France and three from Italy. But I am always keen to find French films, because for many members of the audience French cinema is foreign cinema. Although France has not been at her strongest in the 70s (the Germans have been much more important), that feeling survives.

Is there a sense that audience taste has to be catered for? Yes. I know that I have certain 'minority' interests myself. I realise that certain films which appeal to me will not appeal to many other people. Occasionally, because a film has fallen through, I will programme one of these movies, and usually it is not well received. In any case, a festival shouldn't be based purely on the taste of its director, or of a small group of people. Last year we introduced another new feature, the Critics' Choice. A critic can support a film (which I may not think is one of the best of the year), write a note about it, go on stage with the director.

When I started at the festival, we managed to bring over about seven directors: there was no discussion, they were simply introduced before the film. Now we have what I consider most successful onstage discussions between film-makers and the audience, and that is also one way of measuring the audience reaction. In almost all cases, half the audience is strongly behind the film—although there are not many films that everyone likes. Take, for example, *Sita's Wedding* by Bapu. Several critics who had been going regularly to India admired it very much, but I think their appreciation depended on their background knowledge. The audiences were all right, but the other critics just did not like it at all. I still believe we were right to show it, though the consensus was fairly negative.

The festival now costs between £80,000 and £90,000. About £50,000 is earned from ticket sales, £20,000 comes in a grant from the Greater London Council and the rest, depending on how much is needed, from the BFI. Our actual subsidy has not changed since 1970, and we are tremendously underbudgeted, for a festival which is rather bigger than it was. Some directors' air fares are paid by national organisations; all the Americans come by Laker or on standby flights; and we can't ourselves afford to bring people from as far away as Japan or Australia. All the same, we had 70 directors last year, of whom 15 were British.

Having directors on hand links with something else we introduced in the early 70s. The LFF Club in NFT3, which began by serving free drinks and sandwiches, though we now sell them at cost price, is more talked about abroad than almost any aspect of the festival. Since we are isolated on the South Bank everyone goes

to the same place, and more deals are made there, I suspect, than even in the Blue Bar at Cannes. Errol Morris, who directed the pet cemetery film *Gates of Heaven*, says he has been to many festivals but the only one he wants to go back to is London because he likes the atmosphere and he likes the Club. Of course one would like more space, but its very smallness forces people together.

Should London be a competitive festival? Should we rent a large West End cinema for a fortnight? Many would like it and there are advantages. Many more people could see the movies. But the British film scene being what it is, most distributors and producers don't want their films shown in large cinemas for fear of being cheated of their box-office. There are even people who prefer us to show their films in the smaller NFT2, so as not to cream off too much of their eventual audience. The Sydney festival has a 3,000-seat theatre: I think that's wonderful, but British distributors would not be pleased. And even if we did persuade them, we would lose a measure of the festival atmosphere, the effect of having everything in one small place, with the Club and the restaurant. Consider Cannes, and how difficult it is to get from one cinema to the next, in the rain...

You have to make a festival fun, and to do that you have to keep finding new things. This year I am introducing another new section: 'Living Films', documentaries and appearances by the subjects of those documentaries. It worked well last year with the Alger Hiss film. For three hours you watched Alger Hiss on the screen, talking and being talked about, and then the lights came up and he walked on stage. A frisson. This year we hope to have Helen Caldicott, the American anti-nuclear campaigner, and the jazz guitarist Tal Farlow.

There is of course the perennial complaint from people who can't get in to the festival. But often these are people who are looking for the big movies by the major directors, at the most accessible times. They want to see the Truffaut film at 8.45 on Sunday night. They cannot get in. They are upset. There are only 466 seats in NFT1 and 100 of those are given away to distributors, journalists, people involved with the film. But a big film is almost certain to get British distribution; and you may find that you like the unknown film from Pakistan more than the Truffaut. It would be nice if we could share out the tickets more evenly among the applicants, but given the size of the operation that isn't possible.

Some critics complain that we have grown too large, but maybe they have become a little lazy and are reluctant to see so many films. We could cut down, but there are excellent films which we cannot programme for lack of slots. Last year, for instance, we could have had *The Killer of Sheep*, which is now in this year's programme. Our achievements in the 70s? Primarily, I think, to have created an awareness of the festival in new quarters. The future? Well, cassettes will still need to be promoted. ■

BRITISH

In conjunction with the 25th London Film Festival, the British Film Institute is holding a symposium, 'British Cinema: 1981 to ...', at the National Film Theatre on 4 November. Here, in papers to be delivered at the NFT, the producer David Puttnam (*Chariots of Fire*), Jeremy Isaacs of Channel Four, Peter Sainsbury of the BFI Production Division and the director Bill Forsyth (*Gregory's Girl*) record some present thoughts and future hopes. On pages 254 and 255, Romaine Hart and Peter Dally of London's Screen cinemas, and Sheila Whitaker of Tyneside Cinema offer perspectives on the state of independent exhibition in Britain. Alan Parker did the cartoons.

DAVID PUTTNAM

Producer

Anybody seriously addressing himself to the future should, for the sake of his own sanity, ensure that as many as possible of the ghosts of the past have been well laid to rest. The alternative is to risk joining the merry-go-round of history, eventually not only to be doomed to failure but to look stupid into the bargain. In this respect the British cinema presents a unique problem. Every one of its ghosts is alive, kicking and for all I know, rolling around with laughter. My purpose is to take a look at some of these ghosts, and see if by re-examination we cannot find some comfort in the struggle to establish a recognisably 'British' ethos in world cinema.

Whether the fact that things have never looked anything but grim; or that

CINEMA: 1981 TO...



we have always appeared to be in danger of missing the boat (on the odd occasion when there seemed to be a boat in sight), can honestly be held to be helpful is arguable. But I find it enormously encouraging to know that in an historical sense we are not, nor have we ever been, alone. Having established this personal (albeit possibly warped) philosophy, I must give credit to the two people who more than any others have sustained it, Sir Michael Balcon and Richard Winnington. The former is well known, and much of the encouragement he gave me was personal. He constantly reiterated that none of the problems were new, only the names changed, and not *all* of them. *Chariots of Fire* was for and to an extent about Michael Balcon. I only wish I could have shown it to him.

Towards the end of his autobiography, published in 1969, Sir Michael wrote, 'What saddens me most about the present situation is the sense of "this is where I came in". At the end of the First World War the native British film industry had withered away to nothing and the Americans were dominant. Many of us have struggled in the intervening years to re-create a native industry and at times we seemed to have succeeded. Are we going to acknowledge failure now?'

My other point of reference is Richard Winnington. Less well remembered, he died in 1953, having been film critic of

the *News Chronicle* since 1937. With as few interjections as possible I would like to quote from his reviews and essays, most particularly from the essay 'The Missing Element in the Cinema' (May 1948). All that follows is an attempt to establish my hypothesis that nothing changes, and thus armed, make dealing with our present crises and opportunities more palatable, although, I acknowledge, no easier. Here is Winnington writing in May 1948 about the 'magic' of the cinema, its power and its responsibility. Better than anyone, it seems to me, he understood the fine balance between art and entertainment and was able to assess and enjoy both, together or separately and without condescension.

'... There is an inescapable hypnosis attached to the movie screen that can catch up from his plush seat a sane, balanced, even well-read, adult person, and emotionally implicate him in a novelette-in-motion that, transposed into its literary equivalent, would be scorned by a twelve-year-old schoolgirl. His mind may reject the film utterly, but he will be powerless to move while banality grips him... This power of the screen to unify, coerce, stupefy, enthrall and mesmerise audiences... is either sinister or miraculous according to how it is used, or even, if you like, according to the progress or otherwise of humanity. Certainly a world that does not pretend seriously to seek

peace, that is incapable of feeding itself, that lives fearfully from day to day, cannot be expected to exploit the dynamic art of the screen.'

He continues with what I see as an entirely topical sideswipe at the lack of vision and comprehension of many of our would-be creators. 'The creator of the grown-up film must see in the cinema his only means of expression, and he must see his material as something far richer than the actual, as something far removed from the literal: the paradox of the cinema is that it is anything but photographic... It identifies man with man and place with place, it is a medium of poetry, compassion and illumination. It is an art that nobody will let grow up. Its creators in the screen's short history have done no more than further it into luxurious adolescence, in which condition it will remain just as long as politics, finance and, more importantly, technique rule the artist...'

'... At no period of the cinema's history were films so flat and efficiently uncinematic. In their off-guard moments members of the hierarchy of ace directors who are powerful enough to choose their own films indiscriminately curse the cameraman, the art director, the script-writer, the executive. Conscious of inhabiting an artistic cul-de-sac, they forbear to look within themselves, to acknowledge that they are like conductors of wonderfully well drilled orchestras who cannot find any new or worthwhile music to play. They will argue that nobody would listen to it if they found it, that nobody would back it. But the incontrovertible fact is they do not look for it or have become too atrophied by success to recognise or fight for it... No art is served without endless battle, and indeed the opposition to the smallest advance of the film has all the appearances of invulnerability. Yet it can and will be fought and circumvented. A man such as Roberto Rossellini, who prefers to make his films from hand to mouth in the way that he wants them made, can refuse to be bought at a fabulous price by Hollywood.'

This was 1948, remember. And it wasn't just creators who copped it. Here he is writing about Rank, the first time they went round the course in July 1946. He discusses 'the irreconcilability of Rank the producer of British films with Rank the exhibitor of Hollywood's films... a contradiction that forces Mr Rank to reject with the right hand what he has made with the left hand.' He continues in the same vein eighteen months later. 'Now is the time, I think, finally to assess J. Arthur Rank as a benefactor of the British film. The film critic cannot look at a film as if it came spontaneously from nowhere, a finished creative work. He



must take in economic and political factors that often divert or destroy ideas and soil talent... And he must very soon recognise that the hucksters of the cinema, the middlemen and monopolists, have a lower set of values than the public whose pulse and pocket they have their fingers on and in...

'... Mr Rank made the British industry big and vertical when it should have been small and horizontal. Mr Rank's advisers did not grasp, as the conscious critic grasped and protested, that financial success lay in a direction contrary to the Hollywood path of lavishness and extravagance, that it was parallel to the utmost development of the poetic realism Britain had forged in documentaries and near documentaries. But neither Mr Rank nor his advisers had a clue to the later world scene that was obvious to the most modest observer of historic events. They were taken for buggy rides by slick transatlantic executives in a futile chase of the dollar. They harnessed the half-developed power of the British film industry to a gamble that has failed financially and aesthetically... Mr Rank has already made his defence. He has lost money, it seems, by making "artistic and cultural" pictures... Actually they were neither box-office nor prestige, not honestly high, low or middlebrow. The two directors who have come through with distinction, David Lean and Carol Reed, owe nothing to the Rank Organisation. They are dedicated characters who would have made films anyway. Without the time and resource to become prima donnas they would have made rougher and possibly better films, certainly more.

'The biggest romp of all—the Rank Organisation—is now being drastically curtailed, production expenses are being cut and austerity lies ahead. It looks as if the slogan will be "Box Office at all

costs"... It means that the Wardour Street boys will have more to say than ever as to what you will see in two-thirds of the big cinemas of Britain. And I'll leave you to guess where that will take the British film.'

More than anything Winnington had faith in some day seeing the emergence of a genuinely British cinema, although he would appear to have had as much trouble as I still have in defining precisely what one means by that term. You can almost feel the glee coming off the page when he recognises the emergence of something special from this country. Tentative at first, as with this review of *Brief Encounter* in November 1945: 'Four people remarked separately to me after its preview that *Brief Encounter* was more like a French film, finding about the highest praise they could for it. What they meant is that the film, among other things, is emotionally grown up. But let us be hopeful and say that it is more like a British film.' But full-blown a year later when writing about *Great Expectations*: 'For some time now I've been troubled by an uncomfortable urge to overpraise British films, to wish them, almost, into realms of thought and feeling they inherit but never fully enter. It is not enough that they overtop the normal Hollywood production—and they have done that since 1942—in discretion and discrimination and taste. It is, I think, their heritage to freshen the whole business of film-making.'

Winnington's recipe for the future of British pictures entirely coincides with my own belief that it is in 'anglicising' the cinema of Francesco Rosi and the present-day Italians, and adding the ingredient we have always been best at, that of telling stories well, that we will begin to stagger towards a national style and a resulting confidence. Winnington put it this way thirty-five years ago:

'What the organism of the British cinema needs is a spinal cord of quickly made, specially written stories in the documentary-fiction style to strengthen and link both the unpredictable prima donnas at the top and the visceral box-office machinery below.' What makes his thinking unique and pertinent is that it exists in the following context: 'Hollywood has failed because its films have become thematically and emotionally alien to most people outside America. What I am wondering is whether Britain can be said to have succeeded.'

He accepted as self-evident the fact that films *had* to work internationally. He further understood that this fact did not have to undermine the integrity of the film. Its wide appeal should lie in its honesty and its fundamental subject matter, where and in what period it was shot merely being the 'dressing'. Success breeds success and the reverse is even more true. Unless we can absorb the lessons and, more to the point, the faith harnessed to a sense of reality embodied in the writing of Richard Winnington and the career of Michael Balcon, there is little or no point in looking to any future brighter or more consistent than the 'Great Expectations' of the past thirty-five years, that is, several swallows but no summer. Just in case it appears that I'm joining the cynics I'll end on another Winningtonism, from 1948.

'The film thrives on disaster and stringency, especially in Britain, where by a slow process unperceived in Wardour Street audiences are sorting themselves into several levels of film-consciousness: and when audiences begin to stir, our writer-director begins to inherit. But wherever and in however small a way the film flourishes and moves forward my first pleasure will be to clamour on its behalf in as many places as possible.' So, I trust, say all of us! □

JEREMY ISAACS

Chief Executive Channel Four

No one will expect a new television channel with less than £30,000 an hour to spend on programmes to be anything other than heavily dependent on film made for the cinema. No one will expect the youngest of British television channels to save the British film industry, or revive what is left of it. But Channel Four, which is obliged by law to take some of its programmes from sources of supply other than the independent television companies, can offer some prospect of employment to British film-makers, and intends to put an emphasis on film as art form and information carrier which none of the present television channels yet attaches to it.

The Board of Channel Four and its commissioning staff recently spent a weekend together in Buckinghamshire. We began with intentions. Editor after editor explained what he or she was after, and what sort of programmes brought to the screen would make intention real. All was aspiration. On the morning of the last day, we heard from our film buyers Leslie Halliwell, who spends millions annually on behalf of ITV's Film Purchase Group, and Derek Hill, late of the Essential Cinema. Instantly we moved to

the actual, veritable cornucopias of film to stimulate and delight.

Halliwell offered for our start in November 1982 first showings of major features acquired within Channel Four's price range: *Equus*, *Valentino*, *Semi-Tough*, *Day of the Locust*, *Carnal Knowledge*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. He offered an archive night beginning with Goldwyn but including also such rarities as Ford's *Arrowsmith*, Hitchcock's *Secret Agent*, Gary Cooper in *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, Eddie Cantor in *Whoopee*, Mary Pickford in *Secrets*, and Ronald Colman as *Bulldog Drummond*. We could have both the Barrymores in *Arsene Lupin*, Sid Field as the *Cardboard Cavalier*, Spencer Tracy in *Dante's Inferno*, Sternberg's *Shanghai Gesture*, Dieterle's *All That Money Can Buy* and Lubitsch's *Cluny Brown*. Rare birds indeed, all these and more, enough for a summer and winter.

Derek Hill, whose enthusiasm always threatens to run away with him and frequently does, waxed very enthusiastic indeed. He has been scooping up for Channel Four seasons of international cinema from Europe, India, Japan; he has sampled American independent cinema; he has opened the archive of recent British independent cinema; too much of which, as Maurice Hutton wryly commented, has gone from production to retrospective showing without distribution or exhibition intervening. So Channel Four will show *Stalker* and *Antonio das Mortes*; *A Touch of Zen* and *Out of the Blue*; *Soldier Girls* and *Town Bloody Hall*; *Germany in Autumn* and *Poachers*; and (late evening?) *Richard Pryor Live in Concert*.

All this not higgledy piggledy, but arranged in complementarity and contrast, to show all to best advantage to a public not all of whom will know quite what to expect. Channel Four intends, in other words, to glory in the best of what is alive and kicking in world cinema; to

pay attention to the past; to take thought for the future.

But what about the workers? What can Channel Four do, what should it do, for film-making in Britain? Something, I hope. If British film-makers are prepared to see television as a natural and proper outlet for some of their work (and why should they not?), then Channel Four can offer that outlet, and, in some cases, the funds to make that work possible. We cannot wholly fund major feature films. Not by many millions. We should like to be able to fund low-budget feature films, but are already finding that we cannot do so on our own. Nevertheless, we can and shall put up a substantial proportion of the budget of films costing about the £1m mark which we expect to come either directly on to Channel Four, perhaps going theatrical abroad, or which will go into theatres here before they revert to television. Plainly, the shorter the delay between the film's completion and appearance in the cinema and its availability for television the better from Channel Four's point of view.

Any independent film-maker can apply for funds to Channel Four. If the script appeals sufficiently to my colleague David Rose then, though he has no hope of satisfying the long queue of applicants, he can provide £200,000, £250,000, even at a pinch £300,000, as total budget or as part funding towards the total cost. For BBC Birmingham David Rose produced films such as *Licking Hitler*, written and directed by David Hare, *Penda's Fen*, written by David Rudkin, directed by Alan Clarke, *The Black Stuff* by Alan Bleasdale, directed by Jim Goddard. He is in charge of fiction for Channel Four. Fiction, not drama. Fiction whose origin and exemplar is the cinema, not the theatre. Much of that fiction, as much as we can afford, will be made on film, and we shall place it in a showcase.

And Channel Four will do what it can to stimulate independent film-making at



the root, by funding regional workshops, by supporting the work of the BFI Production Board, by showing the work of British independent film-makers, past, present and future, and by taking an interest in the issues which preoccupy them. We have a statutory obligation to foster innovation and experiment in the form and content of the programmes that we show. British independent film-makers can help us fulfil that obligation.

It will help also if they bear in mind that the television viewer, however choosy, does not necessarily bring with him or her to the viewing that same context of experience which makes dark clear to the avid cinéophile. Channel Four will help put work in context by the arrangement of the schedule, and by a regular critical programme on film, pitched somewhere between *Screen* and Barry Norman, to help all enjoy and

learn from the range of work on offer.

No one should believe that Channel Four owes him or her a meal ticket. No one should believe, even, that Channel Four has sufficient funds to bring into being the body of work which German television is reputed to have made possible for German cinema in recent decades. German television was not on its own. Films could recoup a substantial part of their cost in numerous German cinemas prepared for far more risk in showing new German film than any British cinema chain has yet shown for similar British films. (Perhaps—chicken and egg—if we made different films they would. But would they?) Channel Four, then, is no saviour. But Channel Four needs film, cares about film, will do what it can to get films made and shown. The television connection may offer a lifeline to some. □

PETER SAINSBURY

BFI Production Division

The brief for this short and necessarily schematic article posed the question 'What, precisely, should be the BFI Production Division's relationship with the film industry?' But in what the same brief refers to as 'the jigsaw of British cinema' the pieces appear to be constantly changing shape and the industry is itself a profoundly problematical entity. What follows would not be useful at this time if it were the traditional guarded apologia for BFI production of the sort frequently made in justification of the cultural aspiration towards the established institutions of industry. For in the 1980s British films must, if they are to exist at all, be increasingly conceived, executed and regarded as subsidised cultural products.

This central fact follows from several factors too complex to be elucidated fully here. Among the more salient are:

1. The decline of cinema as mass entertainment; the scarcity of spectators for the spectacle that demands spiralling production and promotion costs as the remaining commercial producers seek to buy their way into a shrinking profit zone located overseas. This evident tendency clearly runs counter to that kind of modestly budgeted production which should be the site for researching and developing ideas and talents, and on which the foundation of a new British cinema might be laid. For films, not primarily and expensively designed for

mass circuit release and the international market, have a very hard time recouping costs, and profits in any real commercial sense are a chimera.

2. The way in which attempts to create a British film industry by legislation over the past fifty years have proved ineffectual, and the way in which fully commercial production in Britain has both flourished and declined despite governmental measures, outside governmental control and in the context of international capital which is wholly indifferent to the quality of the British industry, being concerned only with beneficial conditions for production and marketing wherever they may be found.

3. The growth of a production sector in which the personnel are identified by largely non-entrepreneurial motives and for whom 'independence' is a *sine qua non*—meaning the continuing opportunity to practise, explore, reinvent and use the languages of film in ways generally believed to be incompatible with the history and interests of the industry.

The BFI Production Division has become the primary source of production subsidy. If there is an onus upon it to seek and maintain a precise and proper relationship with the film industry, then little has been achieved. At best there is the progressive attitude of the film technicians' union (ACTT), which has come to recognise the cultural value of subsidised production. With the vertically integrated multinational companies oriented to the world entertainment market no relationship exists—and perhaps none need exist. Worst of all is the largely negative relationship between the BFI, as an agent of production, and those areas of the industry that cohere around existing legislative mechanisms. Yet it says as much about the industry as about the BFI that in these areas BFI aspirations are both parodied as hopelessly esoteric and regarded with all the suspicion of a narrow-minded competitor. And the notion that the BFI is running a training programme—which it has never done—is still used in a myopic attempt to fix BFI production in the shifting landscape of British cinema, despite the fact that the

industry is financing the National Film School for this purpose with increasing largesse.

The development of an increasingly well-financed (although still inadequate) programme of production and distribution subsidy in the BFI does not, however, follow a logic that would entail any such onus. Rather, it is based on the belief that British cinema has far more cultural than industrial value and ought to be supported on that understanding. This belief is not, of course, to be found only in some parts of the BFI. It has been the view of the Association of Independent Producers in its fight for the overhauling of the institutions and legislated mechanisms of the industry and of the Independent Film-makers' Association in its fight for the building of new structures to provide for new developments. And it is precisely in the extent to which these pressures are undermining traditional and inadequate attitudes to British film production that a system of relationships in which the BFI Production Division has a central role can be envisaged.

The main elements of such a system, which exist but remain underdeveloped, are:

1. The National Film Finance Corporation. Originally and for many years an agency for commercial production loans, the NFFC now has a cultural role sanctioned—if to some extent ambiguously—by the Department of Trade. There is no necessary incompatibility between the mechanism of loan and the cultural aspiration, no complete break between cultural value and commercial success. But there are differences between the institutional measures conducive to cultural policies and those designed for industrial activity, and the NFFC's relatively recent cultural orientation is deeply compromised by being surrounded by the remains of a failed industry policy. Further reforms are required to enable the NFFC to play a more distinct and constructive role in those areas of cultural production where individual budgets are highest, loans most appropriate and non-public sources of finance most likely to be attracted.

2. Regional Arts Associations. The non-entrepreneurial and non-metropolitan production sector has to date been supported mainly by the RAAs on specifically cultural grounds and on minuscule resources. This paucity of funds is not, however, the entire reason for the funding provided taking the form of grants and bursaries. It is of vital importance to a culturally healthy cinema that individual film-makers develop modes of production at arm's length from funding organisations and qualify for financial support in new ways. The script should no longer be the only yardstick. Economically, it is equally vital that production be encouraged to cohere around a network of production resources or workshops providing pools of equipment, professional administration and shared experience. It is in these developments that the RAAs have established a central role towards a truly national and independent cinema.

3. The BFI. The Production Division has evolved a system of film subsidy, because this is a form of financing sufficiently flexible to meet the varied requirements of a culturally motivated sector of production. It is able to support a far wider variety of aesthetic ideas and methods of production than can be activated by a loan, while providing a more thorough basis of support for the individual film and film-maker than can a grant. It can be used in collaboration with both loans and grants and can attract to independent British films funds from quite different sources, notably television and overseas cultural agencies. It provides for the pursuit of financial returns on films within a cultural context.

It is hardly possible, as yet, to recognise these three mechanisms and types of funding as essentially related elements within a national system of provision for a British cinema. The chronic scarcity of resources creates competition and mutual suspicion. The continuing belief in outmoded and failed industrial policies

obscures the logical connection between them, so that the use of the Eady Fund to underwrite one is effectively denied to the others. The continuing division of responsibilities for cinema between the Department of Trade and the Department of Education and Science perpetuates a set of false dichotomies. The pressure groups that have argued for a reform of the NFFC on one hand and for more radical measures on the other have failed to form any pragmatic alliance; one rhetoric feels cut adrift without the catch-phrase 'indigenous British industry', while another disparages any suggestion that any element of the industry is of contemporary value.

It is, however, upon the recognition of the interrelation of these institutions within a cultural context, and of the need for a plurality of mutually supportive, if different, mechanisms that the future of British cinema depends. □

This article does not represent the official policy of the BFI or the views of the Production Board.

BILL FORSYTH

Director

I have been working with film since I left school. It took a year or two of actually handling the stuff before I decided that I wanted to be a film-maker. I can't pin down any strong British film influences. As an impressionable teenager I made the leap from prime Hollywood to Europe on the coat-tails of the *nouvelle vague* film-makers. I wanted to be Louis Malle when I was nineteen because he had made *Le Feu Follet*. After seeing *Pierrot le Fou* five or six times I wanted to be Godard, and I still do. If I had a daughter she wouldn't be allowed to date someone who didn't like *Pierrot*.

The National Film School opened just in time, in 1971, and I won a place in the first intake. I was by then an industry veteran, and I lorded it over the Cambridge and Oxford graduates and the Commonwealth cousins who hadn't seen an Arri or a Steenbeck before. My kind of prestige lasted about a week. Back in Scotland, I survived making sponsored films, although we were allowed to dignify our work with the term 'documentary' because it had been invented by a Scotsman, John Grierson. Everyone knows that real documentary is what TV does.

I was already making personal films. Lynda Myles called me a structuralist in 1970, and I kind of knew what she meant. I played with narrative forms involving

montage instead of dramatic action. I thought I was re-inventing cinema, but I was really just like a kid playing in a sandpit. Then I discovered people. I started working with the young actors at the Glasgow Youth Theatre. Ten years had passed since my first tripod-humping days. I think it takes that long to become a film-maker. Film-making is a mature activity.

I figured I was ready for the BFI Production Board. I thought that my pedigree would be irresistible. I was a nice provincial boy with plenty of experience and a film school background, and I was working with young people in an area deprived of just about everything, including film culture. I had a script called *Gregory's Girl*. The BFI managed to resist me and my script for two years running. I remember one torment of a meeting when I tried to explain that *Gregory's Girl* was really a structuralist comedy. I would have jumped through flames for their £30,000, but it didn't come off. I suspect that my script was too conventional although nobody actually told me as much. The BFI didn't waste much ceremony in showing flops to the door.

In the huff with the BFI, I worked with the Youth Theatre kids on another project, something closer to their own way of life than *Gregory's Girl* had been. *That Sinking Feeling* was made to appeal to the very people that it portrayed. We shot on 16mm and my plan was to set up a travelling film show, employing a couple of the youngsters, to take the film around schools and clubs in Glasgow. Instinctively I wanted to monopolise both production and exhibition!

History played a helping hand when it came to making *That Sinking Feeling*. At the time individuals were being galvanised into collective activity by pressure groups like the Association of Independent Producers. One day

Richard Craven of AIP fetched up in Glasgow and addressed a bunch of surly, squabbling, Shell-shocked sponsored film people. He turned them into a spirited band of Independent Film-makers. In the wake of such political arousals I was able to gather together the production and performing co-operative of fifty people to make the film.

Making *That Sinking Feeling* I felt pretty much in control of the material; the setting, the characters, the city itself. If you make a film in familiar surroundings, physical and spiritual, then you leave yourself free for invention where it matters. You can spot a mile away a film-maker who is trapped in unfamiliar territory, you can see him struggling. *That Sinking Feeling* was a success at the Edinburgh Festival I think because it was so unexpected. Just by being there it demanded to be applauded. There was a strong feeling of independents on the march that year. Three or four other British indies were previewed at the same time. There is sense in numbers. Films need each other to thrive.

After the London Festival GTO picked the film up for distribution, but it was too solitary and eccentric a thing to be easily packaged for exhibitors. It came from nowhere, and that is simply too far away for most exhibitors to take a chance on. The joke is that I had to make *That Sinking Feeling* before I was able to make *Gregory's Girl*. Now it's the other way around. *Gregory's Girl* is pioneering a place on the circuit for *That Sinking Feeling*. Again it proves the point that you really have to make films by the dozen to be effective. That is what should be happening in Britain, at least twelve half-million pound films every year. I volunteer to make two of them.

After *That Sinking Feeling* it was easier for me to get to talk to people about other projects. *Gregory's Girl* was still on the shelf. I dusted it off and in a matter of three months, with Clive Parsons and Davina Belling working the magic, I had the film financed with STV and the NFFC. The deal itself was quite revolutionary, a TV company involving itself in a no-strings investment with the NFFC. In many ways I think the deal will prove to be more significant than the film, but nobody seemed to notice it at the time. It taught me to have a lot more respect for producers. Now when my dentist or barber asks me the difference between a director and a producer I have some kind of answer.

Gregory's Girl has found a far wider audience than the kids of Glasgow: my ambitions for the film three years ago. I have seen it screened in a 20,000-seat amphitheatre under a Mediterranean sky. I still feel that my instincts were right in aiming for that local audience of mine. Film is a universal language because it addresses your emotions. The trick is to learn to speak your own emotional language clearly, and then stick in a couple of jokes. If a film isn't provincial then it's from nowhere. □

Continued: Independent Audiences, page 254. ♦

A MINOR MA

Mamoun Hassan interviewed by Pene

During the next year, the National Film Finance Corporation will be backing five or six British films. In the present state of British production and film finance, this is quite enough to qualify it as a major—if only, as its managing director Mamoun Hassan points out, 'a minor major'. Hassan became managing director in 1979; the first film-maker to be appointed to the job. At that time, it looked as though the Labour Government intended to finance the NFFC quite generously: £5m was a widely quoted figure. It also looked as though a British Film Authority would soon be in existence. In the event, the NFFC had to settle for a much smaller sum, and the BFA now looks a long way off. The Wilson Committee is still meeting; the Association of Independent Producers, whose pressure campaign was widely regarded as one of the factors in Hassan's appointment, is still campaigning. All the same, there is a feeling of change in the air. I interviewed Mamoun Hassan in January 1979 just before he took up his appointment, and it seemed a good moment to talk to him again.

MAMOUN HASSAN: I think that things are both worse and better—much better and much worse. When I was appointed, I thought that I was going to be leading a charge. I was given to understand, certainly, that quite a lot of money was going to be made available. What's a lot? ... Well, a lot more than we have now, anyway. I then discovered, within a few months of taking on the job, that in fact I was really being asked to organise a siege. I was in two minds about whether I was the man for a siege, and it's for other people to decide whether I am. I did find it very difficult, because I had had quite a different view of the job.

At the outset, I asked for a hundred per cent of the Eady Levy. When I say that I asked, this was really directed at the industry and the Department of Trade. I did not expect to get it, but I felt at the time, and still do, that the industry has to prove to the government of the day that it is willing to shoulder some of the burden of financing its production programme. The hope then was that the government might be prepared to match us, if not more than match us. What has happened is that the NFFC is now financed entirely through the Eady fund, to the tune of £1.5m a year or twenty per cent of the annual levy,

whichever is the greater. In fact twenty per cent is unlikely to be more than £1.5m, unless of course films shown on television were to become subject to Eady, in which case there would be a dramatic increase. Out of this, we have to fund our production programme, look after the trustee company, look after the National Film Development Fund, run the office and look after the 750 films that the Corporation has backed in its thirty years of existence.

We no longer have to meet the burden of interest that was such a crushing weight on the NFFC in the days of my predecessor, Sir John Terry. Our debt has been written off. We were also given £1m as a farewell present by the government.

So, in effect, in the first year we had £2.5m, and for the next four years, until the legislation that allows us to operate comes up for renewal, £1.5m a year, apart from any income we might make from our films. That's a very, very small sum of money. It forced us in some ways to reconsider our policy. On that money, there could be no question of seeking to support British cinema. What we could do was follow a comparatively narrow policy of backing those films which sought a wide audience but which the industry was unwilling to finance. We also discovered that the policy of putting up a relatively small sum of money towards a film's final budget really didn't work. The producer had our commitment, which was always conditional on him finding the balance. So he tried other sources of finance, he could not get the money, and six months or more would have passed. In that time, the budget had gone up, our money was worth less, and he still was not able to use our commitment as an incentive to attract other investment. Consequently, we realised that we had to bite the bullet with every film we made, and back it to a larger extent. I had anticipated that, but the situation had become worse since other sources of finance had dried up.

I also discovered, disconcertingly, that there was some misunderstanding between myself and my colleagues in the film community as to what I meant by 'British cinema'. I realised rather quickly that what a lot of people meant by British cinema was patriotic cinema. To me, patriotism is, at best, a sentimental and exaggerated view of the virtue of one's own society, and what I was talking about was not patriotism but authenticity. That left room for us to back foreign directors who were dealing with British subjects, and British directors who were dealing with foreign subjects.

As long as the route to our society was discernible to us as a Board, then I felt we should go in. I'm unrepentant about that. I find no virtue in patriotic cinema. I do find tremendous virtues in nationalist cinemas, because nationalism is a political attitude about identity. But it became apparent that as long as a film was set in England, had English characters and employed a British director, that was enough for many people. Often the greatest virtue of a project, if not the only virtue, was that it was British. A number of the scripts we received seemed to reflect that attitude. Which was extremely depressing to me and to the Board, because we were not interested in that. We wanted to back exciting films which gave us an insight into our society.

PENELOPE HOUSTON: Let's mention some titles. When you started at the NFFC, you inherited two projects: *The Europeans* and *Black Jack*. The Corporation have backed Franco Rosso's *Babylon*, Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl* and David Gladwell's *Memoirs of a Survivor*. Coming along are Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital* and Chris Petit's adaptation of the P. D. James novel *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*...

I should explain some of the reasoning behind the films we have backed. Otherwise, it might seem that we just did it; that we simply thought it might be a nice idea. The makers of *Babylon* were amazingly prescient. The film ends, in fact, with the police confronting young blacks, and you feel that there is going to be a riot. It was tragically prophetic, but done in a way which I think cannot properly be called social realism. Social realism sets out the facts. *Babylon* doesn't set out the facts—it explores the feelings. All sorts of people have told me that the film illuminated for them areas of this subculture and its feelings of frustration. They had known intellectually what was involved; they hadn't known how it felt. No one who saw *Babylon*, however, would have regarded it as a lecture. It's an entertainment.

That is one area we should be exploring. And if we hadn't taken the risk and invested in that film, I am fairly certain it would not have been made. Indeed, after the film had been made and seen by a few people, we were told we would have riots in the cinemas. Well, we didn't have riots, but it was that kind of anxiety which made the film so risky. Plus, of course, the fact that the film industry is constantly looking backwards in the assumptions it makes about films and subjects. Until something has been done, the industry refuses to believe that it can

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be done. If it has not happened, it cannot possibly happen. Films about blacks have not been interesting in the past; therefore films about blacks cannot be interesting in the future . . .

Gregory's Girl? We all felt that Bill Forsyth is one of those rare writer-directors who are able to treat serious subjects with great warmth. You expect it from Renoir, from Milos Forman perhaps, but that kind of warmth is something you simply don't expect from a British film-maker. In fact, I think that Britain is extraordinarily lucky in having two such gifted directors as Bill Douglas and Bill Forsyth, who between them represent what might be called the dark and light sides of the Scottish soul. I'm glad to say, by the way, that Bill Douglas has written a script for us: a marvellous script, I think, with a nineteenth century setting, half in England and half in Australia. Not a social realist film, but a film about the nature of history; a work of great originality. It may be financed without us; but I hope we are in a position to help.

Memoirs of a Survivor is the most controversial of the three, and in some ways it will confirm the worst suspicions of some sections of the film trade, that I was taking the Corporation away from the area of films for audiences and into the area of films for film-makers . . . I am not much concerned with the subjects of films, because that in the end is not what films are about. On the other hand, you can't just ignore subjects, and the reasons why certain subjects have not been treated by films. *Babylon* was a subject which had seemed to be taboo. Another subject which frightens everyone is the holocaust—the possibility that our children may not live to reach our age. In the area of Oxfordshire where I live, which happens to be close to the Upper Heyford air base and therefore is a prime target, parents of young children do talk about it a great deal. Should we be building shelters, could we afford it, is it feasible, is there any point? I felt this was a subject we had to film: not survival as some kind of adventure story, but a film which would link up with the anxieties so many people have, both spoken and unspoken.

It seemed to me that we had arrived at that project with *Memoirs of a Survivor*. It is very difficult for any of us to look into the abyss directly, and this was, as it were, a reflected view of the abyss. It was a kind of mirror, so that we could look into the abyss without being turned to stone. The book is written by a major writer, Doris Lessing, the Hermann Hesse of today; we had a marvellous



'Babylon'

script by Kerry Crabbe; and in David Gladwell we had the director to do it: a man who had already dealt with an extraordinary theme, people emerging from their graves, in a completely matter of fact, unarty way. Of course we also realised that there were mysteries in the film, opaque passages, and we were not naive enough to think that it would be easy. It is not allowed for a director who works in our culture to set up questions to which there are no immediate answers. Or no answers at all. And although film buffs are likely to forgive Tarkovsky, when he fails to enable them to understand him, they will not forgive a British director. There is no tradition here of that kind of film where the journey itself is more exciting than talking about the destination.

We knew all those problems, but I still feel it was essential that we should be prepared to take that kind of risk. Whether we are going to succeed, in the sense of getting large enough audiences in Britain, I have no idea. My impression from the Cannes festival is that the film may well get a better reception from audiences on the continent, where they don't have the same inhibitions about movies which are mysterious or opaque.

All these subjects represent risks; and we have been taking risks with the film-makers as well in backing comparatively unknown people. Franco Rosso had directed only one documentary; Bill Forsyth had made a feature, *That Sink-ing Feeling*, but it had not been released at the time we invested in *Gregory's Girl*; David Gladwell had made only one film, *Requiem for a Village*. Of our future plans, Chris Petit has made only *Radio On*; and even Lindsay Anderson I think of primarily as an outsider, always coming in from the outside, never from within.

Britannia Hospital is going to be another risk: it's a very black comedy. Fox had developed the script, and then were I think too shocked by it to want to pursue it. It came to us, and there was considerable discussion by the Board about whether we should be backing a film by such an established figure. None the less, we committed about three-eighths of the budget, and it was then up to the producers, Clive Parsons and Davina Belling, who also produced *Gregory's Girl*, to find the rest. Most of the people Clive approached shared Fox's reaction, I think, until eventually EMI came in. Partly, perhaps, because the shock had worn off with familiarity, since they had been discussing the script for some time, and partly because of Clive Parsons' sheer persistence and grittiness.

Could you say something about budgets and comparative costs? When we talked in 1979, you were speaking of trying to make films for £300,000, while recognising that £500,000 was the cost of a 'cheap' picture.

Inflation has taken care of that. There are very, very few projects we are looking at now which would cost less than £750,000. I can't think of even one. We have had a few projects come in with a price tag of about £500,000, but we have not had any single interesting picture

put up in the last three or four months which is less than £750,000. I don't want to say exactly what is the maximum, in aggregate terms, that we would put into a picture, partly because it has not been agreed by the Board and partly because the maximum then very quickly becomes the minimum. I can say, however, that we would never put up the whole £750,000.

On the other hand, the pictures we have been discussing really were very cheap. *Babylon* cost less than half a million; *Gregory's Girl* cost considerably less than half a million, and is none the worse for it. *Memoirs of a Survivor* was somewhere between half a million and a million (as you can see, I am not willing to give you exact figures); and I believe that film, which is probably the most risky we have backed to date, did suffer from limitations of finance. It suffered in terms of the schedule. That worries me, but we have to make pictures as cheaply as possible, for the obvious reason that we have so little money and for the other obvious reason that the commercial viability of a film depends on its cost.

Our investment on those three films was about 55 per cent of the budget in the case of two of them, and a higher percentage on the third. The films we are starting now are more expensive, because of inflation, and our investment share is lower: something over 40 per cent in one case and something under 40 per cent in the other. *Britannia Hospital* is being backed by EMI for the rest of its budget, and *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* by Goldcrest. But the way we found the rest of the money for the other films is interesting, because each of them is unique. In the case of *Babylon*, the balance was put up by Chrysalis, the record company—in the first instance they were involved simply as investors, and were not thinking at that stage of the music rights—and by Lee International, which is a film equipment company. So that was really quite a curious alliance. Scottish Television invested in *Gregory's Girl*; a straightforward investment, not on account of forward sales to television. On *Memoirs of a Survivor* there were half a dozen co-investors, each of whom fell out at various times, but eventually EMI came in. And that in itself was remarkable, because EMI had not invested in that kind of picture for a very long time. Now of course they are backing *Britannia Hospital*. I think you will find that the projects we hope to announce later this year are going to be equally surprising in the kind of investment they attract.

You are trying to get your returns from a British market, in so far as that exists?

That's right. But the curious thing is that the films we are making now are much more international in appeal. I have always believed that the moment you are culturally specific, other cultures find echoes, find something to interest them, in a way that no one is really interested in mid-Atlantic cinema. I don't say that the Japanese, for instance, find *Babylon* very relevant; but certainly the Scandinavians reacted to it strongly, and so did the Americans. Young French

audiences at Cannes reacted positively to *Memoirs of a Survivor*; and they also understood it.

No, the main problem now is the very limited funds at our disposal. And I ought to make it clear that the problem is not exacerbated by the fees that are paid, because people have in fact been extremely reasonable. They regard the NFFC as something like the National Theatre—they will take lower fees, just as actors and directors working for the National are prepared to take less than when they are engaged by a West End production. In fact, I've discovered that the situation has changed totally, fascinatingly and curiously since the mid-60s. In those days, people made the films they really wanted to make for television, and would go off to do commercial films for the cinema to earn a lot of money. Now people are more properly remunerated for television, and you find they make the films they really want to make for the cinema.

It is not a matter of the film itself, or of the film-makers. Clearly, there are film-makers who work for television—in the same way that clearly there are writers who are journalists. But the important thing is the way that television is viewed, a process which means that there is a constant erasure of experience. Two things have particularly impressed me recently on television. One was Peter Smith's *Bread and Blood*, a really extraordinary piece of work, dazzlingly well shot, and with *mise en scène* and control that left most film-makers standing. The other was John MacKenzie's *A Sense of Freedom*, which I thought was magnificent: a brilliantly crafted work, again superbly shot by Chris Menges, with a kind of dynamism that could stand comparison with Scorsese. It will be seen outside this country as a cinema film. But you can imagine that people watched one of those programmes, and then could not switch off that awful set. They would see the news, say, and later it would be tennis or football, and then a sitcom, and then *Newsnight*. By the end of all that, there is total erasure of the original experience. It is very difficult simply to stop, to absorb any remarkable experience that television gives you.

That, I believe, is a major reason why so many people who are able to get employment in television, and are well paid for making programmes which mean a lot to them, still feel they would rather take a cut in salary and get ulcers for two years in trying to set up a movie. They would rather do it for the cinema because they know that it will be taken seriously. Its reception will be concentrated and caring. And that really is a remarkable change: ten years ago people were not looking to the cinema for the things that really matter to them.

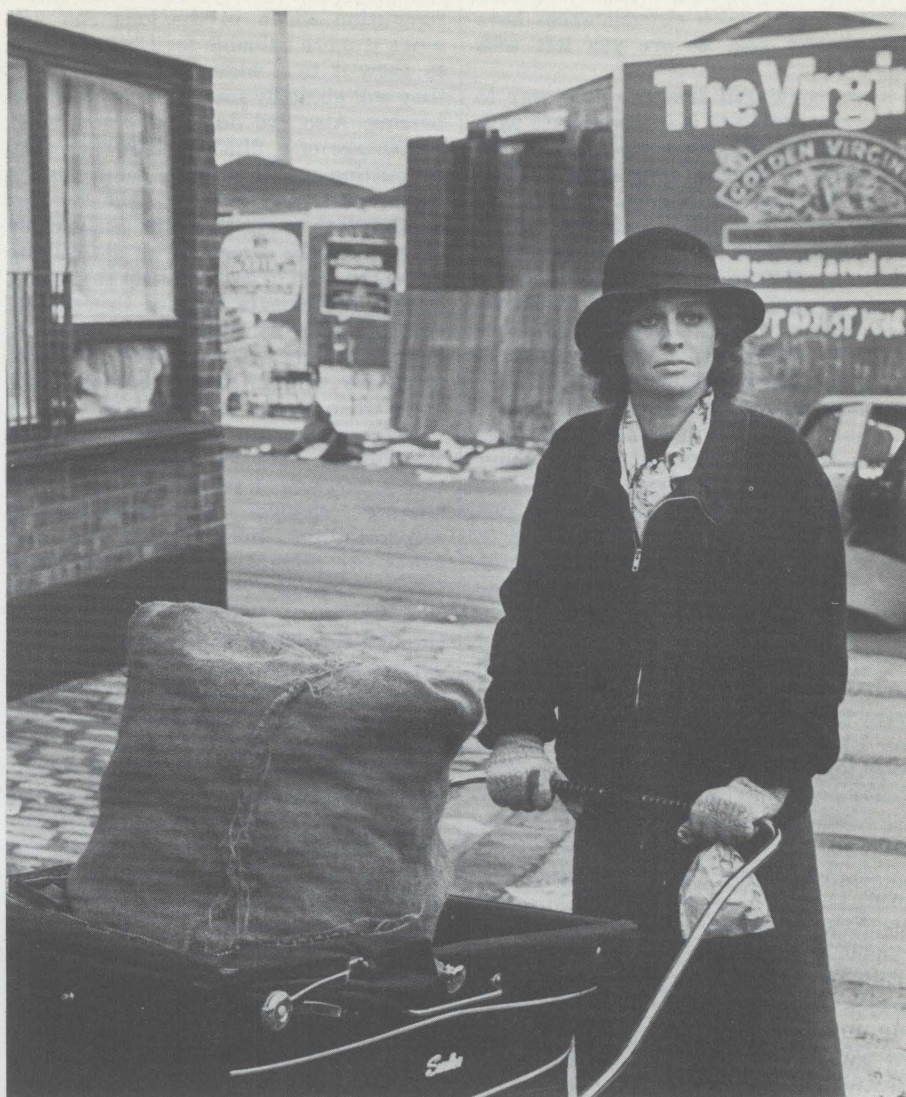
I said at the beginning that things were both worse and better, and this is one of the ways they are better. In my first year, I was very disappointed by the quality of the projects submitted to us at the Corporation. That is no longer the case, and if you gave me £10m I could spend it easily in the next three months on really exciting films. It seems that film-makers have at last decided they must make

films for audiences: films with very serious purposes, but which are also entertaining. The projects are coming from all sorts of people—young, old, middle-aged. They suddenly seem to feel they know what the cinema is for. There is an energy and dynamism, and at the same time a wish to communicate, that I have not seen before. What has happened to produce this change, I don't know. I'm only surprised, and delighted, and at the same time extremely frustrated that we are not in a position to finance more of them.

Curiously, there are at the same time attitudes in both the film-making and the film-receiving community which I find extremely destructive. This is one of the things that are worse—worse, in fact, than I have ever known it. Of course there has always been a tendency in Britain to put down artists and their work: we have to wait for foreigners to tell us how good our films are. But there is another attitude now, which amounts to a widespread fear of criticism. There is a terrible word which has been around for some time, but which now seems to have become an attitude, an approach to discussing films, and one I find dreadfully destructive. The word is 'bad mouthing', and at the moment almost anyone in the film community who criticises almost anything is accused of bad mouthing. I come back to the patriotic point: you are as it were criticising Britain and British effort if you make any really critical point about any British film. As far as the film-makers are concerned, the criticism must be due to malice, jealousy or whatever. There is none of the openness that existed, say, at the time of Free Cinema, when of course there was controversy but there was also a kind of fun in it.

I feel in the atmosphere now a real wish to stop criticism. It applies to everyone—producers, film-makers, the industry. What people really want to say to you is just shut up, don't rock the boat. And that means none of us is going to improve; that we kid ourselves the films we are all involved in are actually perfect. Not that they are fine but flawed, maybe, or that they are good but could be better, but that they are *perfect*.

That is one attitude. The other is that you really should not criticise films because you don't have the instruments of analysis, you haven't passed the right exams. Here, obviously, I am speaking about people like the semiologists, who also want to shut you up, unless you speak in a certain language. Their attitude is that you can only write about the cinema if you use certain terms, and no one from outside that system, that little circle, has a right to comment. It's an attitude which I find extremely oppressive, and from quite a different starting point it links up with the film industry approach: it stops criticism. In the long run, it's self-defeating. I think that if you *don't* criticise you are actually harming British cinema. Fortunately, the film-makers we have backed recently, Franco Rosso and Bill Forsyth and David Gladwell, do actually listen, if not perhaps always at relevant moments, and I am impressed by the fact that they are



Julie Christie in 'Memoirs of a Survivor'.

prepared to hear the criticism first and the praise second.

All the same, I remember saying two years ago that there was likely to be friction because of the way we intended to operate. That is, we were going to have discussions with film-makers not only about quantities of money and so on, but about the quality of their work. And that has come to pass ... It's difficult. I believe wholeheartedly in the independence of the film-makers to make the films they want to do; and I also believe that if it is left to the film-makers themselves, the concept of the audience gets further and further away. It doesn't matter who it is, as long as there is someone to say to them, 'I am an audience: I don't know what that means' or 'I am an audience: what is the point of that scene, or that cut?' But the moment you start asking those questions, there is an implication that there is an answer to the question. And that, in turn, implies for the Corporation a role which goes beyond our status as a film bank.

There are now more people on the NFFC Board who are actively involved with films: the producer David Puttnam, Colin Young, the Director of the National Film School, exhibitor Romaine Hart, journalist Barry Norman. Apart from the chairman, Geoffrey Williams, the only people who aren't in some way connected with the film business are Lord Remnant

and Felicity Green. People whose livelihood is in films can't help but have views on everything. They think about movies all the time; they ask questions. As a result of all this, our relationship with the film-makers has become much more complex.

The crunch comes when you ask questions which the film-maker finds either irrelevant, impertinent or unhelpful. Everything is all right as long as the film-maker finds the question helpful; as of course they often do, even if on a personal basis they think you're an idiot for asking it. But although I say that we are no longer a bank, and that the Corporation now operates more like a publisher, none the less the Board has to operate like a bank in the sense that it has to be sure the investment is being looked after, the money properly spent, and that the project we end up with is the project we thought we had backed. At the same time, the relationship with the film-makers is a difficult and complex one, and I don't quite know where it will take us. All I can say is that I am aware of the difficulties, and that I sympathise with what film-makers feel.

When we talked before, you stressed that it was necessary to think in terms of a programme of films, that one-off ventures wouldn't work. I would think a programme would have to mean about six

films a year, which circumstances have not allowed you. So are you left with one-offs?

I am convinced that the only way to solve our problems is to co-operate with a broad-based company, with the resources to plan a programme. I had hoped that we might have worked with Rank, who are now of course out of production. And we have now two films with EMI. But we do, in any case, have a programme. In my own mind, when we back a film, I think about how it connects with the others, and I hope people will recognise that a film backed by the NFFC has a certain commitment to cinema as it relates to life. We now have two films which are due to start shooting in about a month, two more which are likely to start in the autumn, and a further two which I hope will start at Christmas or in the spring. In present terms, that makes us a major—if only a minor major. For the first time we can look to a kind of continuity.

We will have real problems next year, however. By that time, we will no longer have the benefit of the extra £1m, and our £1.5m will already be worth a great deal less than it was even a year ago. Inflation in film production, of course, far outstrips the rate of inflation in the real world. So by next year we will be talking effectively about only one or two pictures, and at that stage the question would be whether the game is worth the candle. We would all have to think very hard about that. The government may decide that the system is not really working, or that it is working but not well enough, and that the only solution is to find ways to give us more money.

There are one or two things that might happen, meanwhile. As you know, the existing legislation precludes us from making forward sales to television in Britain, though we can make forward sales to overseas TV companies. The Wilson Committee has recommended that this should be changed, and this seems likely to happen soon. If we can arrange forward sales to Channel Four, or indeed to any other channel, then our money will go a little further because the film-makers will be seeking less money from us. More important is the second Wilson Committee recommendation: that when television companies invest in film production the expense should be allowable against excess profits tax. Because of course television is the source of finance for films. We need to get television to invest effectively, but without the destructive hold that the television companies have, for instance, over the German film-makers. Television has had a bad effect on German cinema, apart from the early days.

Is Channel Four likely to change things?

I think its significance is going to depend not so much on the principle as on the actual amounts that it is able to put up as guarantees against forward sales to television, and on the extent to which it is willing to accept some barring. If Channel Four insists on showing a film it supports on the day it opens in cinemas, then the film has no real theatrical potential, and no chance of making a

reputation which in the long run will make it more valuable for Channel Four to show it to a wider audience. I hope they will abide by some kind of modified barring. Also, we don't yet know what percentage of a film's budget they may be putting up. If it is no more than a tenth or a twentieth, it will be just another way to get the most unshowable films on to the screen. If we are talking about the kind of creative help that could change the climate both of British cinema and of British television, there must be much larger sums involved. We have all heard various figures quoted; we'll know when we see the contracts.

Before there can be a really effective relationship between cinema and television, however, I think there has to be another change: the departmental responsibilities must reflect the real world. At present, we have the Home Office dealing with television, the Department of Education and Science, through the Office of Arts and Libraries, dealing with film as art, the Department of Trade dealing with film as commerce, the Department of Industry dealing with things like satellite transmission, and British Telecom involved with the equipment end. That no longer relates to the real world. Of course there are differences between film and television, but the same people work in both media and obviously every film that is ever made is going to be shown on television in the end. We all know that the separation between art and commerce is nonsense—take a film like *Heaven's Gate*, which is not a commercial movie but one of the most expensive art movies ever made. If you are going to arrive at a rational structure for the funding of film and television, then there has to be a continuing dialogue between the various departments involved. Not the kind of meetings that occur once in a while at present when particular issues come up, but regular discussion. What we need is a kind of federal status for the different departments involved with the visual media.

Are you in favour of the British Film Authority, which would bring the various interests together?

No. I like the idea of the Authority, but it also worries me. I am concerned about the centralisation of so much power. I would prefer there to be a formal structure of, say, monthly meetings, a loose grouping rather than bringing everyone together under one umbrella. The main thing to be agreed first, however, is that the government would actually find it useful to have a change in the structure. At the moment, the separation of responsibility makes it hard even to talk to government. And all this is going to become even more necessary with the forthcoming developments in satellite, cable and so on.

You have talked about film-makers being concerned to find audiences. But soon, surely, it is going to be cheaper and more effective to release minority films on disc or cassette, rather than to have empty seats surrounding the few people in each area who want to see the film?

I don't know that that is true. The so-called minority films have in fact been doing very well—in London and in some of the major cities, admittedly, because there is just no exhibition outlet in other towns and areas. The successful exhibitors, people like Romaine Hart, David and Barbara Stone or Roger Wingate, don't share the general pessimism in the industry about cinema audiences for these films. They're imaginative people who have been able to create audiences, as well as to bring the films to them. At the moment, of course, the Monopolies Commission is looking into the question of the supply of films to cinemas. I hope the Commission may recommend some relaxation of the barring system, so that independent exhibitors who are prepared to take the high risk of showing minority films will also have access to some of the more commercial product.

So you are still backing cinemas and cinema audiences?

Financially, it makes sense. After all, the very high prices that are paid for films by television are dependent almost entirely on the films' cinema performance. One of our films, for instance, did quite well in the cinemas. Before it was shown, we were negotiating price x with one of the television outlets; after it had done well in the first two or three weeks of cinema release, we negotiated a price which was 3x. Or there may be an independent distributor in America who wants to take your picture. You know that however well the film does, you are going to get almost nothing out of it. The exhibitor takes his profit, the independent distributor takes his commission, the costs are passed on to you, and you end up with zero. But you know that when you are selling the picture to television in the States, the price will be much higher if you can quote the cinema box-office figures, the publicity and so on. In effect, we are sacrificing income we should be getting from cinema exhibition in order to raise the price to television.

In fact, television needs cinemas. Otherwise, you will no longer have quality in television, you will just have quantities. You would simply be selling a film running ninety minutes or sixty minutes or thirty-five minutes: a length of footage with a title attached to it. The cassette revolution may change this, and it is bound to have a positive effect on minority films. People who buy films on cassette and disc will be the same sort of people who now buy hardback books; and in fact the price won't be very different. But I also suspect that the cassette and disc makers will not be taking audiences away from the cinemas so much as from television. People do still want to see films in cinemas. Our problem is finding the money to make the films they want to see. Even if I am wrong, even if we only have a decade or two left of cinema, that does not affect our responsibility to the film-makers and film audiences of today. I feel frustrated, sometimes angry, but not downhearted. Bill Forsyth's optimism is catching. As Charlie says at the end of *Gregory's Girl*, 'Andy, I think everything's going to be all right.' Maybe. ■

DOUBLE TAKES

QUINCANNON discusses the mysterious case of John Ford's phantom film and the rise in America of a real right-wing film critic.

Wapping lie

In his story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, Borges writes of an unknown middle-eastern country that first turns up in a single copy of a pirated edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and then takes on a strange phantom existence. There are a number of movies like this, most originating through changed titles or re-editing, or from projects announced and abandoned. A 20th Century-Fox promotional movie made in 1937 (recently screened in the National Film Theatre's 'Hollywood in the Mirror' season) promised the company's foreign sales staff that they'd soon have *Lawrence of Arabia* to sell.

One of the most remarkably Borgesian of phantom movies is John Ford's *So Alone*, an eight-minute film shot in London in winter 1957 starring John Qualen and James Hayter, about 'the relationship between (and incidents in the life of) two men as they wander through Wapping on a cold winter day.' It surfaces in the filmography of Peter Bogdanovich's *John Ford* (Movie paperback, 1967) between *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Last Hurrah*. In an otherwise identical filmography in the 1978 edition, however, *So Alone* has disappeared to be replaced by *The Growler Story*, a curious-sounding half-hour promotional documentary for the US Navy featuring Ward Bond as a submariner called 'Quincannon'.

So Alone gets into Ephraim Katz's *International Film Encyclopedia* (1980), and Andrew Sinclair in his authorised biography attached great importance to the film, writing warmly of it, 'Ford showed how much he now felt at home in England by shooting for the Free Cinema and the British Film Institute a short film about two street singers walking through Wapping docks. It was called *So Alone* and its title seemed to mock Ford's increasing isolation in the cinema world.' The SIGHT AND SOUND reviewer of Sinclair's book made enquiries around the BFI after being categorically assured by Kevin Brownlow that *So Alone* didn't exist; the general feeling was that somebody, possibly Lindsay Anderson or Walter Lassally (credited as co-photographer on *So Alone*), had invented the picture as an in-house joke back in the 1950s.

Now in his *About John Ford*, Lindsay Anderson reveals that the first time he heard of the picture was from Bogdanovich's book and suggests that *So Alone* was 'a leg-pull in the best Fordian tradition.' The movie, he infers, was invented by Ford after Anderson had shown him *Every Day Except Christmas* at the NFT and, presumably, provided him with material about the Free Cinema season.

The plot of *So Alone* is, of course, a parody of Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together*, which Anderson produced. 'Perhaps there was even a touch of friendliness in the joke,' Anderson anxiously suggests. But just when Ford dreamed it up (if indeed he did) and how Bogdanovich came to accept this *Quiet Piltown Man* of a movie remain to be explained.

Preversions

Another of the year's odd stories concerns the novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*, which brought a posthumous Pulitzer Prize to John Kennedy Toole. According to the dust jacket, the author committed suicide back in 1969 after failing to find a publisher for his book. Toole's mother persuaded Walker Percy to take an interest in it, and he persuaded the Louisiana University Press to publish the novel. The grotesque protagonist of this free-wheeling misanthropic satire, Ignatius Reilly, spends his time making life hell for his fellow citizens of New Orleans. Like the hero of Walker Percy's own first novel *The Moviegoer*, Ignatius is an obsessive patron of the cinema, but in his case it arises from a different impulse—a peculiar loathing of Hollywood. He goes to feed his hatred and annoy the management and audience. Three remarkable pages are devoted to Ignatius' violent reactions to watching Doris Day in *Jumbo* (neither the film nor the star is named) from MGM lion to final fade-out, and how he disrupts the performance. The feminist organisers of last year's NFT season 'Move Over Miscon-

ceptions: Doris Day Reappraised' will be interested to note that Ms Day is held up as the very epitome of a debilitating popular culture ('Oh, my God,' he screamed, 'here she is') in what would have been, had it found a publisher in the 1960s, the first novel to launch an outright attack on the new feminist movement.

Had the manuscript of *A Confederacy of Dunces* arrived anonymously on my desk, I would have guessed that the author in whole or part (he was the pseudonymous co-author of *Candy*) was that great literary prankster Terry Southern. The ruthless humour and sly cinematic jokes are close to what one finds in *The Magic Christian* and *Flash and Filigree*. It even contains the words 'preverts' and 'preversions' that Southern introduced through his script for *Dr Strangelove*. Clearly Toole must have been heavily influenced by Southern, and from the little we know of him he was writing this novel in New Orleans at the time Southern was there working on *The Cincinnati Kid*. Richard Jessup's novel *The Cincinnati Kid* is set in St Louis and was transposed to New Orleans for the film. Curiously, the *New Statesman* reviewer of *A Confederacy of Dunces* made the astonishing error of writing about Toole's novel as if the locale was St Louis.

Rebel fantasies

In her first collection of pieces, *I Lost It At the Movies* (1965), Pauline Kael included an essay 'Fantasies of the Art-House Audience', the central contention of which was that in the guise of having an elevated cultural experience educated people used prestigious foreign movies to indulge themselves in much the same way that popular audiences watch Hollywood films for purposes of wish fulfilment. An interesting illustration of her



Gene Hackman and Barbra Streisand in 'All Night Long'.

argument occurred recently when two movies arrived in London, each directed by a European film-maker working abroad in a language not his own. In both a successful businessman, estranged from his wife and family, experiences a kind of spiritual numbness that drives him to an inexplicable act of violence. This desperate outbreak changes his life irreparably.

These movies are, if you haven't already guessed, Jean-Claude Truamont's *All Night Long* and Ingmar Bergman's *From the Life of the Marionettes*. In Truamont's engaging comedy Gene Hackman rebels by throwing a chair through his boss's office window, is demoted to managing an all-night drugstore in Los Angeles, and ends up establishing his own 'small is beautiful' workshop in a converted warehouse, where he lives with Barbra Streisand. In Bergman's lugubrious psycho-drama, his German hero breaks away by murdering a prostitute and bugging her dead body; he then settles happily to a lifetime in gaol playing computer chess and curling up in his cell at night with a teddy bear.

There can be little doubt as to which of these careers is the more reasonable, likely, exemplary and (arguably) mature. But not a single British newspaper critic saw any connection between the two films, and with the sole exception of David Castell in the *Sunday Telegraph*, they opened their columns with the Bergman movie, treating it with great respect even when not liking it too much. *All Night Long* was relegated in some cases to a passing mention, and treated without respect even by those who found it entertaining; generally it was considered less convincing than *From the Life of the Marionettes*, and to decline into sentimentality, a charge not made against Bergman's picture.

Right turns

Interviewing Jean-Paul Sartre for the *Observer* in 1961, Kenneth Tynan asked if 'it was possible to create right-wing art.' Unfortunately he said 'le droit' (the law) instead of 'la droite' (the right), and before he could correct himself Sartre launched forth beginning, 'By all means, yes. The law is theatre.' When Tynan posed the real question, he was told: 'In my opinion, no. Because nowadays although the right may still be in control of events, to the extent that it still has power, it has lost the ability to understand them.'

This exchange comes to mind in contemplating the emergence in America of Richard Grenier, a man of the nouvelle droite who also lays down the droit, putting liberal audiences and film-makers in the dock in the columns he has been writing these past couple of years for *Commentary*, the monthly magazine published by the American Jewish Committee. Traditionally one of the outstanding liberal journals in the English-speaking world, *Commentary* has moved during the 1970s towards a neo-conservative position, a course acutely charted by its editor Norman Podhoretz in his memoir *Breaking Ranks*. Over the years it has had some good film critics—Robert Warshaw was on the staff, Manny Farber published several of his best pieces there (among them the much anthologised 1957 essay 'Underground Movies', making out a then highly unfashionable case for 'the unpriized second-gear celluloid' of Walsh, Hawks, Wellman and Mann). But though Warshaw wrote on political aspects of the cinema in the post-war years, *Commentary* has never

had, and perhaps never needed, a thorough-going ideological critic. Now it has got one: a critic of ideologies from an ideological position.

There have been occasional right-wing forays into British film criticism, but the liberal orthodoxy of our weekly and periodical criticism, and the more recently Marxist-oriented writings of the film teachers and their para-academic allies, have never been consistently challenged from the other end of the spectrum. This is not to say that we have lacked conservative critics in either a political or cultural sense. But the only reviewer who has ever looked like becoming a champion of the right is Alexander Walker, a combative libertarian conservative and film critic of the *New Standard* (formerly the *London Evening Standard*) since 1960.

Walker has used his *Standard* column to bait the left over Vietnam and other issues, as well as conducting a running battle, through a voluminous public and private correspondence, with the British Film Institute over what he considers the left-wing domination of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Nevertheless, his critical appraisals are rarely influenced by his political views and he frequently espouses the cause of film-makers of opinions antithetical to his own (Bertolucci among them). He has been the most persistent opponent of film censorship in this country, and accepted with characteristically wry humour the sad gesture on the part of left-wing film-makers a couple of years ago when they refused to let their pictures be included in an NFT season he devised of films consciously or unconsciously expressing right-wing attitudes. As an Ulsterman, Walker knows that one consequence of the reunification of Ireland would be the imposition on

Faceless

The character actor Vince Barnett was familiar to audiences in the 1930s and 40s for his numerous appearances as a sad-sack gangster (a sort of comic Elisha Cook Jr) and famous in Hollywood for his practical joking. When he died in 1977 this bald, moustachioed, lugubrious fellow, who looked rather like Popeye's friend Wimpy, had apparently been long absent from the screen. Consequently several British cinéphiles were interested to note what may well have been his final appearance in Jonathan Demme's 1975 *Crazy Mama*, which surfaced earlier this year in the Roger Corman season at the NFT (then later at the Scala Cinema Club). What a brilliant homage, they thought, to the crime films of pre-war years to cast Barnett as a filling-station owner who is robbed and trussed up by the film's middle-aged gangster heroines as they cut their comic swathe across America.

When Demme was in London for the opening of *Melvin and Howard*, someone congratulated him upon this clever

casting, and asked where he'd found Barnett and whether the septuagenarian had played any of the practical jokes of the sort he'd worked on famous visitors to Hollywood, Roosevelt, Churchill and Bernard Shaw among them. Demme looked puzzled, and only when his interrogator had identified Barnett through a supposedly unforgettable sequence in *Scarface* and explained where he appeared in *Crazy Mama*, did Demme recall his presence. The director then explained that he'd taken over the picture at the last moment and hadn't been responsible for the casting. This story is rather like the theatre critic who congratulated Edward Albee on his brilliant evocation of Eliot's *The Hollow Men* by setting 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' to the tune of 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush'. Albee was impressed by the interpretation, but explained that the nursery song had been chosen because it was in the public domain, while the tune of 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' belonged to Walt Disney.

Vince Barnett (left) in 'Scarface'.





Alexander Walker interviews director Jules Dassin at the National Film Theatre.

the North of the most severe film censorship in the Western world.

Writing for an evening paper, Walker has to confront every movie that comes down the road. Contributing an essay every month or so, Richard Grenier can choose his targets with care. Like all *Commentary* writers now, he distrusts the young, the liberal, and the fashionable. The French New Wave are attacked for being apolitical when they started out, for being left-wing in the 1960s, and for appearing to remain young. Jane Fonda is a term of abuse and perhaps

could only fully clear her name, one suspects, by being appointed to the Atomic Energy Commission or admitted to the Daughters of the American Revolution. What he most enjoys tracing are the patterns of liberal treachery and paths of historical ignorance, especially when it's a matter of reworking the recent past.

Grenier's piece on the revival of Gance's *Napoleon* (*Commentary*, April 1981) is partly an attack on the loathed Francis Coppola, partly a sneer at trendy liberal audiences paying \$25 to see a silent movie at Radio City Music Hall. The film's success, Grenier suggests, only proves how little New York audiences know about the history of the cinema, the life of Napoleon and the politics of the French Revolution. A major factor in its popularity is a desire for affirmative patriotism, but although Grenier can easily accept the patriotic impulse of middle-America, especially as rekindled by the Teheran hostages and the Reagan victory, he distrusts such attitudes in his fellow moviegoing New Yorkers. Their enthusiasm for *Napoleon* he attributes to George Orwell's concept of 'transposed nationalism', arguing that liberal Americans are so hostile to their own country that they can only root for the French.

Orwell figures in a key Grenier essay about popular attitudes to the police and the military called 'The Uniforms That Guard Us' (May 1981). In this astute piece he discusses Orwell's changing state of mind as he came to gird up his loins for combat at the beginning of World War II, prior to celebrating Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* as an honest movie about the uniformed victims of power struggles. This is perhaps the most favourable review he has written for *Commentary*, and leads up to a demolition job on *Fort Apache—the Bronx*

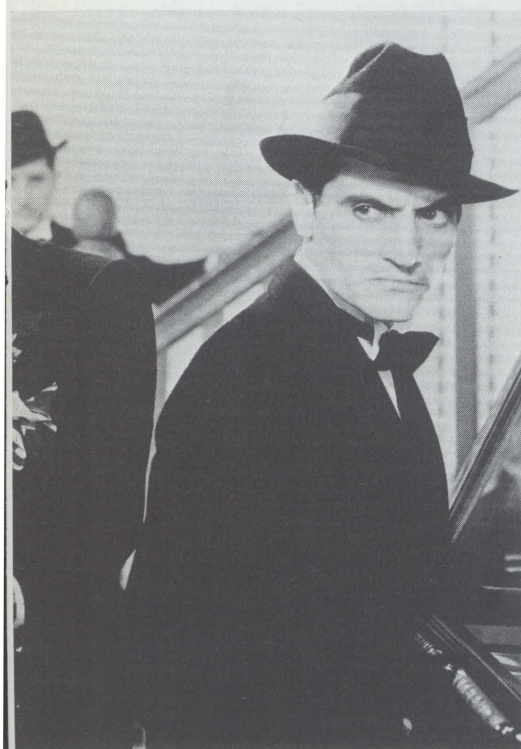
(liberals failing to support their local police). Most recently (June 1981) Grenier has taken the Bond films to task for their diminishing commitment to the Western cause in the cold war. In the same article he praises the Sylvester Stallone cop film *Nighthawks* for taking a suitably ruthless attitude towards Moscow-educated international terrorists.

Grenier is a well-informed and intelligent writer, but his polemical bent often leads him to ignore or distort evidence, and to alter the rules of his own game. He can view with contempt the patriotic response to *Napoleon*, but sitting a few weeks later with an audience further down-market at a cinema showing *Nighthawks* he almost exults in their quasi-fascist response: 'Anyone who has studied the subject at all realises that, when a major terrorist campaign takes hold in a country, that country's civil liberties are reduced as surely as night follows day. In an early scene in *Nighthawks*, just to set the mood, Deke DaSilva drags a criminal he has just knocked out across a deserted subway platform while droning the words of the Miranda warning to the unconscious body: "You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to legal counsel ..." The scene wins a roar of laughter from the audience, and I would say—no doubt to the horror of the ACLU—a roar of approving laughter.'

Grenier never considers that the Bond movies are British in origin and thus partly conditioned by our local politics. Moreover had he looked more closely at Fleming's novels he would have discovered that the cold war ethos had been abandoned before the films went into production. The apolitical criminal organisation SPECTRE arrived to replace SMERSH (Fleming's own version of the KGB) with *Thunderball* in 1961, and in the 1963 adaptation of *From Russia With Love* SPECTRE was substituted for SMERSH. (SPECTRE is, as Grenier might have noticed, a British acronym.)

Grenier wrote about *For Your Eyes Only* before it had been shown to the press, and in the event proved wrong in predicting that its political thrust would be in favour of some moribund détente. In the pre-credit sequence, Bond despatches Ernst Stavro Blofeld (a figure Grenier has some trouble understanding) before throwing himself into the cold war to prevent the British Navy's NATO MacGuffin falling into Russian hands. The head of the KGB, who exists live but snarling after his showdown with 007 in Greece, is played by Walter Gotell, a formidable actor who played the head of security at the top-secret nuclear research plant in Losey's *The Damned*, the boss of Soviet intelligence in *Black Sunday*, the chief constable of Thames Valley Police in TV's *Softly, Softly*, and a powerful Arab plutocrat in *The Stud*. Very likely Grenier would see this casting as a sinister blurring of the moral lines between different positions of power, all brought about by irresponsible liberal movie-makers.

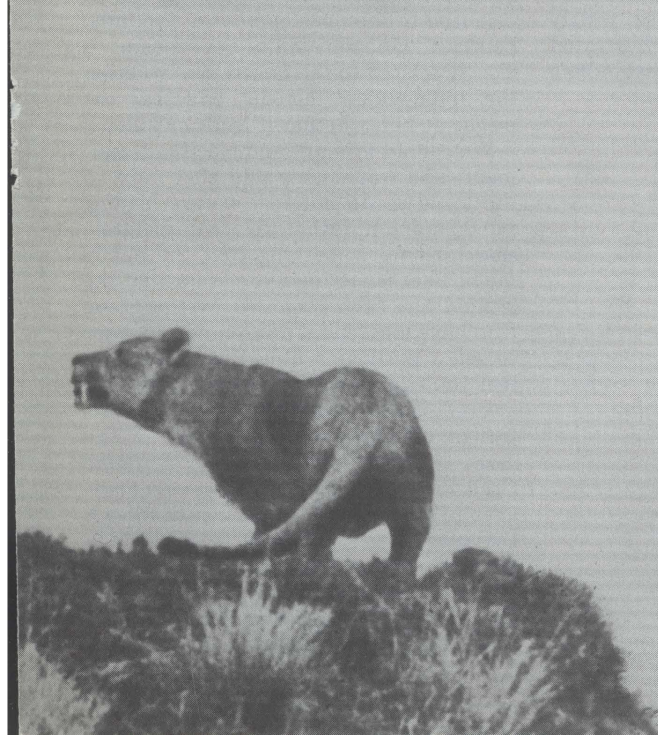
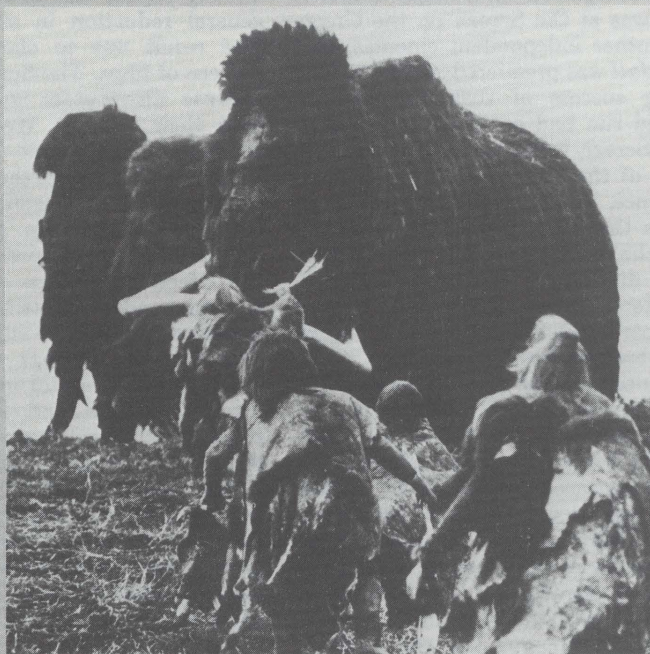
QUINCANNON





Quest for fire

'*Quest for Fire* will do for the uncharted past what *Star Wars* did for the unchartable future,' says the film's producer, John Kemeny, sweepingly. At any rate, the credentials are intriguing. Direction by Jean-Jacques Annaud, who made *Black and White in Color*; script by Polanski's collaborator Gerard Brach; appropriate primitive language devised by Anthony Burgess, with anthropologist Desmond Morris advising on demeanour. This ambitious effort at reconstructing a primeval past has been filmed on location in Canada, Scotland (Fort William) and Kenya. The mammoths are Indian elephants in rugs; the leading fire-seekers are played by Everett McGill, Ron Perlman and Nameer El Kadi.



INDEPENDENT AUDIENCES

ROMAINE HART/ PETER DALLY

Screen cinemas

In 1970, what is now the Screen on the Green was a run-down hall in a shabby part of North London showing third-run adventure programmes—the site of Hercules' last stand, as one wit remarked. In 1981, in its new form and recently refurbished, it is showing first-run films and producing returns which if the trade press collated the figures properly would regularly put it in London's top ten.

The story of irresistible progress? An upward graph which can be reassuringly projected into the future? Not quite. For the reality is that this comforting success story contains the life and death of a concept and has created a present of many uncertainties which rest largely on factors outside our control. Until the early 70s the London cinema could be seen in terms of a polarity between the commercial cinema, namely the Rank/EMI duopoly, and the 'serious' cinema, characterised by the Academy and the Curzon, archetypal art houses. The Screen on the Green, drawing, unconsciously perhaps, upon the example of the repertory policy of the Classic Cinemas, created a new kind of cinema for people who didn't much want to go to either of the existing types. Thoughtful programming and good atmosphere created a place where watching films was fun. By persistently aiming our programming at new local residents we built a friendly relationship with our audience and the audience, more importantly perhaps, came to know each other.

Programming relies heavily on American independent production, and the policy was double bill, low ticket prices and weekly changes. The films that were successful then were Michael Ritchie's *Downhill Racer* and *The Candidate*, Monte Hellman's *The Shooting* and *Two Lane Black Top*, Spielberg's *Duel* (the TV movie), *Fritz the Cat*, and early De Palma and Scorsese movies. That concept has now gone. To some extent it is

continued by the Scala (who have re-defined it), the Ritzy and the Rio. The Screen on the Green meanwhile is now showing first-run films on a single feature long-run basis. Strangely—and probably temporarily—relying for its success on British films (*Prostitute* and *Gregory's Girl*). The reasons for this change are many and chiefly related to the success of the Screen itself. Many of the directors who gave the Screen its early successes have crossed over to the mainstream.

Even where a director's work has not become inaccessible to the independent cinema through success, the nature of that success has changed the independent cinema. By way of illustration, Woody Allen's work was regularly shown at the Screen on the Green before he became recognised as a major director. And it was at the Screen on the Green, among other independent cinemas, that *Annie Hall* was premiered in the UK. The amazing success of that film and its extended run had an immediate impact on the Screen in terms of audience perception of the cinema and regularity of attendance. It also had a longer term effect in that the cinema and its stablemate, the Screen on the Hill, which opened during the run of *Annie Hall*, were offered the chance to open similar high-grossing, long-running films, which in turn brought further changes.

The success of the Screen preceded the growth of the independent cinema in London. In the six years after the opening of the Screen five major independent cinemas appeared in London. In the following four years at least five more opened. This had a double-edged effect on the policy of our cinemas. New areas have been opened up. The success of David and Barbara Stone, of the Gate Cinemas, in opening up the German cinema in England has given the Screen the ability to programme more widely than at the outset. This is illustrated by the successful run of Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*.

However, there is now more competition for product and an awareness, however wrong-headed, by the distributors of the potential of their films. Films which might have been shelved ten years ago or possibly, after much persuasion, been given to us to try out as a double-bill for a week are now given a mini-launch in four cinemas in the hope that they might repeat the success of *Annie Hall*. (Amazingly, *Two Lane Black Top*, the Screen's first major hit and for many years its box-office record holder, was double-billed with Polonsky's *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here*—hard to imagine that happening now.)

The success of the Screen—a 300-seater at a time when the average cinema held 2000—reinforced a trend which had already begun, that of twinning and the general reduction in size of auditoria. The result was to change the release pattern of films. The Screen was affected because distributors were now able to hold their films in West End cinemas much longer by means of move-overs to smaller halls. Thus they were able to take more out of their films before releasing them to the Screen. These factors not only changed the nature of the Screen on the Green but led us in 1978 to form an independent distribution company, Mainline Pictures, to supply the Screen. The product shortage meant that the independent exhibitor had to go out and get his own films, and the broadening of public taste meant that it was possible to do so and hope to succeed.

One reason for the changes over the last ten years which merits separate consideration is the film press. Crucial to our growth has been the existence of the weekly magazine *Time Out*. The continued existence, and one hopes the growth, of an independent, broadly based and generally popular film journalism will be essential to the development of the independent cinema. Film journalism is closely related to the question of whether the independent cinema educates the public or not, whether it leads or follows.

We cannot attempt an objective assessment, and would only add that most of the time we do not feel we are leading public opinion, rather we are desperately searching for something that the public might like. Sometimes you know that the ground has been prepared by the press, who have created an awareness and want to see a particular film. Sometimes you feel you can make the media create that awareness—for example, with the Australian cinema and particularly in the case of *Newsfront* and *My Brilliant Career*. Sometimes you can get an audience to see a director's work even though the press are uninvolved or even antipathetic. For example, the films of John Waters. Then, of course, it does seem that you are leading the public.

In one way the future of the indepen-



ALAN PARKER

dent cinema looks sound: the independent sector is almost bound to grow if, as seems likely, Rank and EMI continue their policy of closures. (In itself this policy is partly the result of the success of the independents.) This can only be good. However, set against this must be the continuing collapse of the theatrical box-office, the growth of video and the imminence of pay and satellite TV, rising costs and falling margins. Our hope though is that the outcome of these new developments will be a larger and more varied independent cinema offering the same breadth of choice as is available in, say, Paris or New York. □

SHEILA WHITAKER

Tyneside Cinema

Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle, which has two theatres, seating 400 and 150 respectively, was established in 1976 to promote a better understanding of world cinema. It has charitable status and is grant aided by Northern Arts, the BFI and Tyne and Wear County Council. A club with approximately 2,500 members holds screenings in Cinema 2, the smaller auditorium. There is an information centre, bookshop and restaurant. We organise evening classes and day and weekend schools with the Workers' Educational Association and the University of Newcastle, and in addition hold animation classes for both adults and children. Tyneside Cinema is basically a broad-based repertory theatre; and major seasons—for example, on war, gangsters, censorship, musicals and the representation of women—are supplemented by monographs.

Earlier this year, we issued the first in a series of research questionnaires. Replies to the question 'What would prompt you to come to Tyneside Cinema more often?' included: 'Better films'; 'More choice'; 'A bigger selection of new films'; 'Films at the Tyneside are unheard of'; 'Famous films'; 'Seeing more good films' and 'More films I want to see'. We asked 'If you visit other cinemas more often, please specify why', and the replies included: 'Go to see major film releases'; 'More appealing films'; 'The films are more modern'; 'Better films'; 'Bigger selection of new films' and 'Variety of films available'.

Asked 'What kind of films do you enjoy?', 26.3 per cent said they preferred 'New non-circuit releases'; 22.5 per cent 'Rarities'; 20 per cent 'Foreign films'; 12.1 per cent 'Re-runs'; 8.6 per cent 'New independent cinema'; and 6.3 per cent

'Grouped in themes'. Of those who replied to the questionnaire, it is worth noting that 76 per cent were aged between 19 and 35.

Although general, these replies tell us very much what we think we already know (and perhaps our questions were influenced by this knowledge). However, I believe they sharply illuminate our problems. As far as the audience is concerned, what is a 'better' film, and how is this judgment reached? Is it the same as saying we want 'a bigger selection of new films' and the 'films at Tyneside are unheard of'? What do the 22.5 per cent who want 'rarities' actually consider a rarity? What qualities, either in itself or its reputation, must such a film also have to prompt the respondents to see it? How much can we do, in terms of publicity and hard information, to persuade them to see such a film? How can we persuade more people to view, desire and engage with independent cinema, and in what context?

The BFI Production Board, for instance, is now financing films with larger production and publicity budgets. If they manage to produce films which are accessible, in industrial terms, these will be offered to and taken by circuit cinemas, thus bolstering the ailing industrial exhibition base. (Cinemas such as ours gamble with risky independent features, but the Odeon takes *Gregory's Girl*, which we screened in November in a festival of independent films.) It may appear that such a situation is producing an audience for alternative cinema, but in fact it does nothing in the short term to help independent regional cinemas and nothing to foster a committed audience for cinema in general. It simply produces an audience which accepts an alternative kind of discrete product—providing the publicity budgets are large enough.

The reverse of this is to have a cinema which is small and (apparently, at least) esoteric. In this case, the danger is that such a cinema assumes a minority audience and inhibits the more willing members of the majority audience from sampling its films. This situation holds for example in Tyneside Cinema 2. Replies to the question 'Do you come to screenings in Cinema 2?' included: 'Not a club member'; 'They're all a bit way out—aren't they?'; 'Because of the membership'; 'Feel it's too much of a club'. There is evidence here of a hangover from the past when the cinema was club only, but it also indicates a sense of film and context defining its audience. More publicity would help, but for a non-metropolitan audience without the benefits of all London can offer, context is, perhaps, a factor not to be overlooked.

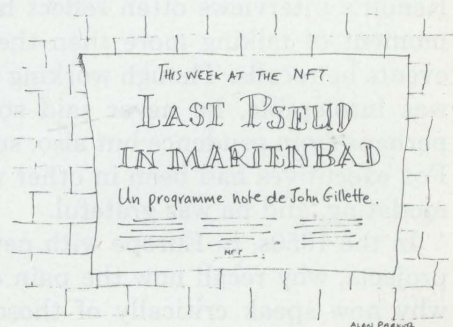
Clearly all independent cinemas work within certain constraints and are affected by particular local factors, not least of which are their own histories, their potential and actual audiences and, of course, their funding. This aside, however, they all face the quandary of whether their activity is to be directed towards culture as knowledge or culture

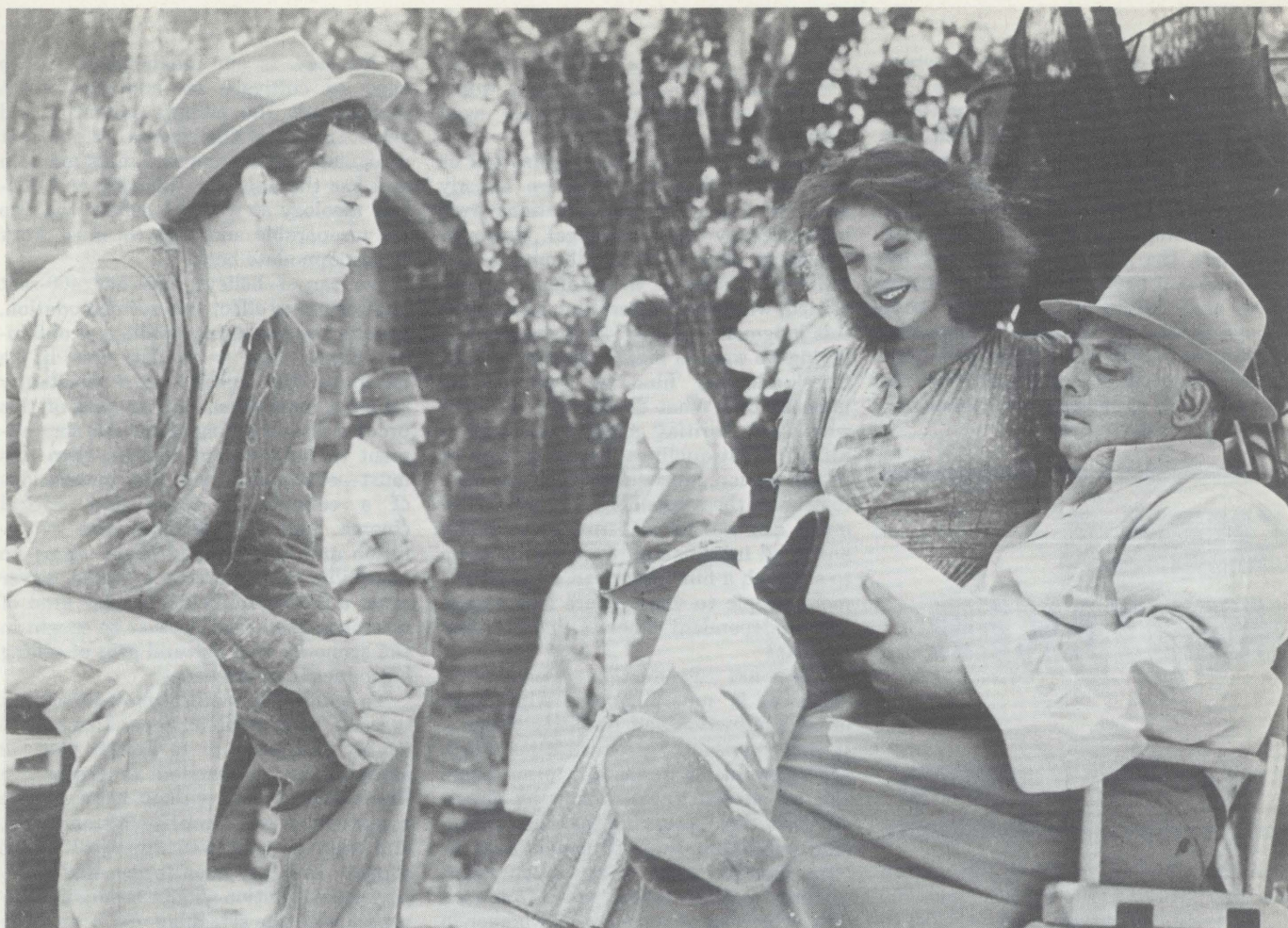
as ideology. Is our independence to be used to cultivate an audience which understands the history, potential and achievements of the cinema, or one that recognises the cinema as a mass medium and has the ability to identify and analyse ideology at work? I believe the two are inseparable and that we must work to accommodate both.

We can, I believe, use our 400-seat auditorium to effect this accommodation, despite the increasing problem of obtaining films. This is to say that if we recognise film culture as a constantly evolving institution, and as part of this process do something about our commitment to independent cinema, then this must—eventually—lay the foundations of a committed, aware and critical cinema audience. Without this recognition and commitment there seems no possibility of producing a viable, never mind a critical audience for any kind of cinema, and we shall forever be caught in the economic and cultural grip of selling a product to an audience.

To ignore the institution of cinema as it exists at present in hopes that it will simply disappear; or to assume that an audience for independent or alternative film-making exists without asking 'Who comprises, or will comprise this audience, and what do they want anyway?'; or to suggest, as it has been to me, that independent exhibition should be largely concerned with the screening and promotion of independent productions, is either to assume that the revolution has already happened or to remove from the audience its inalienable right to choose. It is our duty to provide the means by which the audience can properly make choices. Independent cinema cannot simply be constituted as oppositional cinema, since its potential audience is embedded in the institutions of production, distribution, exhibition, criticism and, of course, today's concepts of pleasure. To offer more of not-quite-the-same is to follow the path of the theatre which is, by and large, dead.

To change the face of British cinema, it would be necessary to change the cultural, social and political hegemony. But I do not believe the situation is hopeless. There are still 2.38 million people going to the cinema each week; the question is how to transform this audience into one which actively seeks choices. We must also discover—and the next stage of our research will hope to answer this—what reasons people have for not going to the cinema. ■





Dana Andrews, Ann Baxter and Jean Renoir during the shooting of 'Swamp Water'.

Discovering America: Jean Renoir 1941

ALEXANDER SESONSKE

Very little that is accurate in detail has been published about Jean Renoir's first year in America and his experience in making *Swamp Water*. Renoir's interviews often reflect his feelings at the moment of talking more than the actuality of the events he recalls. Though working in the Fox studio was intolerable, he never said so publicly, partly perhaps from prudence but also, surely, because the Fox executives had been in other ways very accommodating, and he was grateful.

In the 1950s, in Europe with new hopes and new projects, why recall now the pain of that first year, why now speak critically of those who had in all

good faith offered him refuge when he needed it. He smiled and said that of course he had worked as freely in Hollywood as in France. Later, I think that he began, like all of us, to remember the things he had often said about the past better than he recalled the past itself.

The present account has been derived almost entirely from Renoir's correspondence in 1941, supplemented by the memories of Dido Renoir and Jean Slade. For a more detailed account of the making of *Swamp Water*, see my 'Jean Renoir in Georgia', forthcoming in *The Georgia Review* (Spring 1982).

Although Dido Freire had talked to Robert Flaherty as early as January 1939 about the possibility of Jean Renoir working in America, and Renoir had written to Flaherty from Rome early in May 1940, asking advice about an offer from Hollywood, it was not until after the fall of France and the installation of Marshal Pétain as head of the Vichy government that Jean and Dido began the odyssey which led from Les Collettes to Hollywood. Leaving Cagnes on 6 October, they travelled to Marseilles, then on to Algiers, Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, with delays and bureaucratic entanglements at every stage. The fact that Jean was French while Dido travelled on a Brazilian passport complicated the journey and finally separated them in Tangier, where Dido waited for a visa while Jean went on to Lisbon. Reunited, they sailed on 20 December on the American liner *Siboney*—a journey made more interesting by the chance that Jean's cabin mate turned out to be Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

The *Siboney* docked at Jersey City on 31 December 1940; Robert Flaherty welcomed the travellers to the new world by flinging Jean's French hat into the water. A few days in New York, an obligatory trip to Washington where Jean was required to present himself to the French ambassador, then a flight to California. By mid-January they were settled temporarily in the Sunset Towers, 8358 Sunset Boulevard. Jean quickly signed a contract with 20th Century-Fox and began to take lessons in English.

On 15 January a telegram from Eric von Stroheim offered a Stroheim story as the subject for Jean's first American film, if he didn't already have one. But Renoir never lacked subjects and began soon to suggest some to his agents and to Darryl Zanuck, head of production at the Fox studio. He thought one of the novels of Knut Hamsun, such as *Hunger*, might make a good film, or Claude Tillier's *My Uncle Benjamin*, about a little French provincial town before the Revolution. But mainly he had hopes for an idea which grew out of his experience in the flood of refugees fleeing from Paris before the approaching German army in June 1940. He conceived all these projects as ones in which he would participate in writing the scenario, as he had always done, and would then shoot the film from a script which was in some respects his own. He told his agent his idea for a film about children caught at the edge of the war in a stream of refugees, and when the response was positive set about writing the story. Initially, naively, he foresaw no problems about getting the studio to accept his script as the basis for his first film.

By mid-February Jean and Dido had moved to 8150 Hollywood Boulevard, a house large enough to accommodate a stream of guests throughout 1941, including Robert Flaherty, Saint-Exupéry, Joris Ivens, Pare Lorentz and, immediately, David Flaherty, who had volunteered to help Jean develop his new story

and to become acquainted with America.

Coming from warring Europe, the first impression Jean and Dido had of America was of light, movement, freedom and an overwhelming abundance. They took photographs of the mountains of food in the Farmer's Market. They were astonished and delighted that their black servants drove a new Chevrolet automobile. But when Jean professed a desire for one just like it, he was told that it would be inappropriate; for a man in his position nothing less than a Buick was acceptable. Such incidents helped form Jean's first, rather unfavourable impression of Hollywood. The people, however admirable or successful, seemed agitated, driven, unable to relax—they had *la bougeotte*, the fidgets. Jean was struck by a sort of falseness of this city where houses were built of chicken wire and plaster, yet imitated a dozen different styles. To Albert André, painter and old family friend, he wrote of 'this sort of exposition '37 which is the city of Hollywood,' and of Southern California as 'a sort of desert, artificially irrigated,' but where 'the light is not ugly. Very Claude Monet.'

1941 was an ominous year for many Frenchmen. Renoir quickly found that being a prominent Frenchman with a Fox contract entailed a steady stream of appeals for aid, from the French consul for support for French language broadcasts, from French War Relief, from France Forever, from some of the unemployed among the local colony of French émigrés. Renoir responded generously to these appeals, though he wrote once to Charles Boyer, 'I am not at all a "Gaullist" but all the same I am going to send some money.'

More difficult were the appeals from abroad. Not only friends and relatives but also casual acquaintances hoped or expected that he would aid them in coming to America or getting a job in Hollywood or placing their writing in an American publication. Some were desperate; they were Jews, or aliens, or were known to have had Communist sympathies. Intermediaries appealed on behalf of Louis Jouvet, of Sylvia Bataille. Siegfried Kracauer wrote of the terrible plight of Joseph Kosma. Haakon Chevalier solicited aid in helping André Malraux reach America, and Renoir wrote to Zanuck identifying Malraux as a distinguished French writer and film-maker who, like himself, had been mixed up with the Communists in the 30s. He suggested that Fox might offer Malraux a contract and thus help him enter the United States. The response was that, for confidential reasons which could not be written, the studio could not act on that suggestion.

Renoir replied to these requests positively but cautiously, for the one case in which he spared no effort made him well aware of the limits of his influence. As soon as he had signed his Fox contract, Renoir had begun trying to arrange for his son, Alain, to join him. Like his father a generation earlier, Alain had volunteered for the French cavalry at the outbreak of war. He had participated in

the debacle of June 1940 and was still in uniform when Jean and Dido left Cagnes. Demobilised and unwilling to sit out the war at Les Collettes, Alain wandered to Casablanca where he found work as a cameraman in a local film enterprise. Securing an exit visa from French territory or an entry visa into the United States was not simple. Jean tried every avenue, friends, French and American officials, the Fox studio where he found both sympathy and a willingness to assist in any possible way. Fox executives agreed to offer Alain a contract as an actor, if that would help—an idea that Alain indignantly rejected. He had been an assistant cameraman on *La Bête Humaine* and *La Règle du Jeu* and, unlike his father, looked upon the profession of actor with disdain.

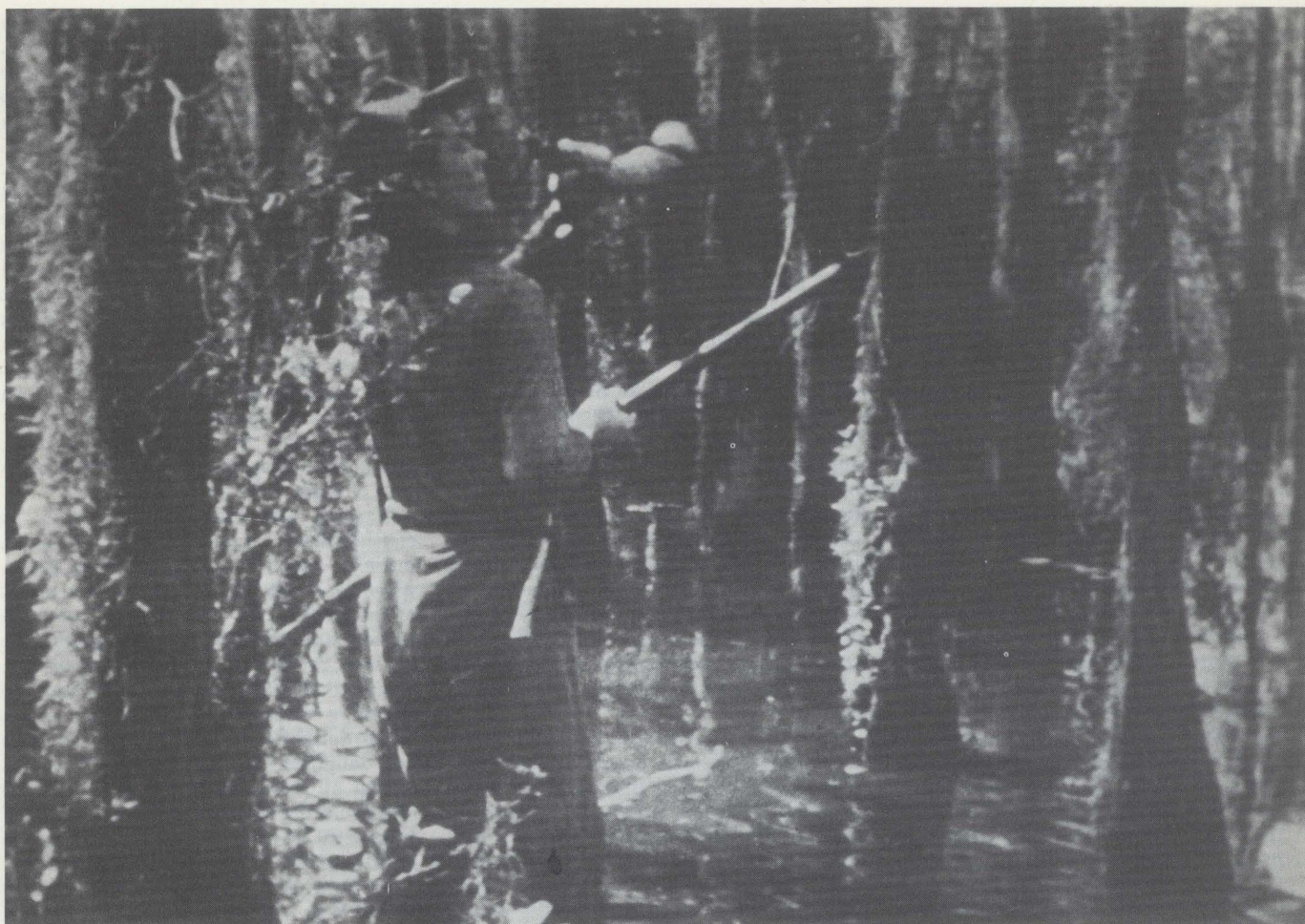
Through the year Jean persisted, at considerable expense and without, initially, much co-operation from Alain, whom Jean envisioned as 'In the midst of the Arabs, free from father, free from uncles' and enjoying his independence. As one requirement of the enterprise, Jean had to affirm his loyalty to Marshal Pétain, a necessity that he professed not to be delighted by, though he was also not delighted by the studio secretaries, sitting at their desks, 'filing their nails and declaring that the Marshal is a Nazi.' In general he avoided involvement in the politics of the French émigré community.

In February Jean's leg wound from World War I, quiescent for twenty years, became cripplingly inflamed and painful—an event which would now recur intermittently through the rest of his life. Still, by late February his story was taking shape and he could write, 'I am going to be able to envisage a work with Fox.' In April he wrote this account of his first months in America:

'My agent, Feldman, arranged my contract with Fox . . . No doubt I will begin working in a month. During the three months I have been here I have really become acquainted only with my agent, my doctor and my English teacher. Apart from these three I frequent the many French who are exactly in similar circumstances. For two weeks I have begun to talk a little broken English and have begun to have a bit more communication.

'Here I am not Jean Renoir making his xth film in his country, but a newcomer, very nicely welcomed, having found an engagement that many Americans have not found, but who is going to make his first film in America. If this beginning is good, I could do many things. For example, I could bring my brother over, which is impossible right now. There is another way of looking at things. And I swear that I lean in this direction. That is to consider my trip a voyage of study. That in making one or two films in technical conditions unknown in Europe, I will learn a good deal, and that, after this stage, I will return to my country where I can profit our own industry by the knowledge I acquire.'*

*All Renoir's letters in 1941 were, of course, written in French, with those to Americans being translated before mailing. The translations herein are mine.



The Okefenokee swamp: Dana Andrews searching for the dog, Trouble.

By then, late April, Renoir had already lost some of his illusions about Hollywood. His idea for a film, developed first as a story about boys in a home for delinquents who are liberated by the advancing German army, then grew into a script in English, *Flight South*, which Renoir urged Darryl Zanuck to consider until 28 March, when his agents explained why it was unsuitable: it contained more of the physical presence of war than American producers were willing to accept, and it treated openly and explicitly the subject of class consciousness and conflict, which American films had generally sought to avoid.

In response Renoir suggested, with great enthusiasm, a new idea. On 29 March he wrote to Zanuck, 'I am sure now that I have hit upon the idea for a very great film.' He had just read Saint-Exupéry's *Terre des Hommes* (*Wind, Sand and Stars*) and wrote to Saint-Exupéry that he had read the book 'et j'en suis sur le derrière.' He wanted to propose it to Zanuck, 'a personnage of such importance that I have only been able to see him so far twice for three minutes.' Renoir hoped Saint-Exupéry would collaborate on the adaptation. Now more cautious about dealing with the studio, he feared that Fox might buy the rights to the book, then assign it to a studio writer or another director, or even just forget it. So he urged Saint-Exupéry to insist, in negotiating about the film

rights, that the contract state that Jean Renoir will direct it.

Saint-Exupéry flew to Los Angeles, where he and Renoir visited an agent who showed much less enthusiasm for their idea than they did. For two months Renoir tried to promote the project, writing late in April to Saint-Exupéry that *Wind, Sand and Stars* 'will be the most beautiful film of my life.' But no one in Hollywood was interested.

Still it was time Renoir was working; so he was asked to consider several scripts by studio writers. In mid-March he read *I Wake Up Screaming* and thought it had possibilities, but wondered why they should want him, a Frenchman, to do something any American director could do. Rather, he asked Zanuck to read his script, *Flight South*, or consider *My Uncle Benjamin*. Instead Renoir was urged to read and accept *Venezuela* (later called *The Day the Earth Shook*), a script by Nunnally Johnson from a novel by Stefan Wendt, a property in which André Daven, another French émigré who had become a Fox executive, had an interest. Renoir responded diplomatically that he admired Johnson's wonderful script but that this action-packed melodrama, featuring an earthquake and a prison break, was not at all the sort of film on which he had made his name, nor did he think it very suited to his talents. Nevertheless, the studio pressed him to accept and finally, reluctantly, he wrote Zanuck on 23 April accepting the assignment and stating his preference for Jimmy Cagney

rather than George Raft in the lead role which Jean Gabin had declined.

By 14 May *The Day the Earth Shook* was postponed because of casting problems. On 15 May Renoir once more asked Zanuck to consider *Wind, Sand and Stars*. No longer so innocent about Hollywood, he wrote to Charles Feldman, 'I could do good things in America, but only in an atmosphere of freedom. I am incapable of succeeding with the methods of the big studios where they bring me a script that I have not written myself that I must follow like the Bible. I am more an author of films, a searcher of ideas, than a director... Since you explain that I won't find here the possibility of working in such freedom, must I renounce Hollywood?'

Saved temporarily from what he foresaw as the disaster of *The Day the Earth Shook*, Renoir looked for a permanent release, and found *Swamp Water*. In early May Dudley Nichols' just-finished script circulated in the Fox studio. Zanuck thought it too long; Fritz Lang thought he should direct the film. Renoir got the script about 17 May and found it infinitely preferable to *The Day the Earth Shook*. Its centre was plausible human interaction, also it promised some escape from the studio. And at this moment in his life, when his effort to retrieve Alain from Casablanca had made him acutely aware of the relation of father to son and the desire for independence of a 19-year-old, the interaction and tension in *Swamp Water* between father and son, Thursday and Ben, struck a



Real swamp or studio reconstruction? Jean Renoir with actors and crew.

responsive chord. So he reported to the studio his fervent desire to make *Swamp Water*. Later, when the film was shot, he would write, 'We pass by a great subject without penetrating it. It's too bad—but it is still something to be able to direct a film with a story that is not completely idiotic.'

Remembering how European directors in Hollywood in the early 30s had been helped by working with an American dialogue director, Zanuck decided that, whatever Renoir's first Fox film, he would assign veteran Hollywood actor/director Irving Pichel to it as producer and dialogue director. On 23 May Zanuck assigned Renoir rather than Lang to *Swamp Water*. On 24 May he wrote to Renoir of his plans for the film. He had borrowed Walter Brennan for the role of Tom Keefer and would not have made the film without him. He would cast Linda Darnell as Julie and Dana Andrews, a relative unknown for whom Zanuck predicted stardom, as Ben, with Dean Jagger as Thursday. And though Dudley Nichols had assumed that all the scenes set in the Okefenokee swamp would be shot in the studio, Zanuck wanted Renoir to go to Georgia and find some locations where Irving Pichel would later take background shots.

Renoir met Nichols on 28 May, at the first studio conference on *Swamp Water*, where the discussion concentrated on

complying with Zanuck's demand for drastic cuts. That night Renoir left for Georgia. Renoir and Nichols became fast friends instantly and soon began planning further collaboration. Through that summer of 1941, they discussed this in letters, while Renoir described to Nichols in some detail the troubles he had in shooting the film.

In Georgia and Tennessee Renoir found aspects of America he had not yet seen. He wrote to Albert André about his trip to the South, calling Georgia 'an old country, very primitive, with peasants who remind me of the inhabitants of very isolated corners of Brittany' and where 'nature is at the same time soft and hostile.' The people were easy-going as well as witty, likeable and unfailingly courteous, though they 'think of Hollywood as a far more distant and bizarre place than France.' 'Down there in Georgia the families have no idea of quitting their wooden farmhouses. The tree which shades the porch has been planted by some ancestor. There are peaceful conversations while swaying on the swing hung by ropes from the beams of the flat roof.'

In 1937 the Okefenokee swamp had become a National Wildlife Refuge. Renoir called it 'a sort of tropical Sologne' which was fascinating and beautiful, but had little resemblance to the foreboding and dreaded setting of Nichols' script. Still, he returned to California convinced that *Swamp Water* would be a much better film if the exteriors could be shot on location. But

the Fox technicians assured him they would build a fine swamp in the studio.

Renoir also argued vainly that the film should be set in the past, for Okefenokee was now a well-known tourist attraction and it would seem ridiculous for a contemporary Georgian to be fearful about penetrating its edges. But Zanuck thought differently: 'The people who live down in Georgia and know the swamp, which is one out of every five million who will see the picture, will automatically think the story is laid in a period somewhere around 1895. The general public, who know nothing about Georgia except that it is a land of swamp, will believe that the story takes place in a more or less modern period. I don't think any writing should be changed or details altered because of this.'

On 7 June Renoir saw Linda Darnell's latest picture, *Blood and Sand*, and quickly wrote Zanuck that he thought her quite unsuited for the role of Julie. He suggested instead Ann Baxter. 'I have seen some of her tests and that has been a revelation for me concerning the role of Julie. I think that her person can suggest to the public the whole pathetic and tragic situation of Ben's little fiancée without our being obliged to explain it by long-drawn-out scenes or too abundant dialogue.'

Zanuck changed his mind about Dana Andrews and thought John Shepperd might be better as Ben, but Renoir now wanted Andrews and Baxter. Through mid-June, as he discovered that at the Fox studio 'one has more the impression

of working in a shoe factory than in cinema,' Renoir also thought about the world he had left and to which he still belonged. He wrote to Halley des Fontaines, producer of *Le Crime de M Lange*, 'The work I am doing here presents no artistic interest at all. Hollywood is an immense machine, an admirable mechanism without a soul... My great hope is to return soon and be up to my teeth in making a great French film.' To Signor Barattola of Scalera Films, producer of Renoir's unfinished *La Tosca*, he expressed the joy he had felt working in Italy and the expectation of returning there. And on 20 June he wrote to Gabrielle, his caretaker, companion and mentor in his childhood, 'Dear Ga... It often happens that I fall asleep with a terrible longing to be near you. Write me, perhaps that will make me forget a little the distance that separates us.'

Though Gabrielle had continued to live in France after her marriage, Jean had seen her infrequently after 1914; at least once they did not meet for four years. Gabrielle's son, Jean Slade, developed tuberculosis of the bone, and she spent five years with him at Berck on the Channel coast. Jean visited there occasionally, sometimes camping on the beach where later he would shoot the final scene of *Le Crime de M Lange*. In August 1940 the Slades and the Renoir family came together again in Cagnes, a reunion in enforced idleness which brought back strong memories of Jean's childhood and reknit the bond between Jean and Gabrielle. It also made more painful their new separation in October. In July 1941, perhaps spurred as much by Jean's letters as by the growing hardship of life in France's unoccupied zone, Gabrielle and her family left France for the United States.

Darryl Zanuck chose the cast for *Swamp Water* with little or no consultation with Renoir, though he finally did accede to Jean's wish to cast Ann Baxter and Dana Andrews as Julie and Ben. Renoir also won some small concession to his desire to shoot exterior scenes in Georgia, though the only actors that Zanuck would send east were Dana Andrews and the dog, Trouble. On 25 June Jean and Dido were back in Waycross, with Irving Pichel, cameraman Lucien Ballard and a small crew, but with no sound equipment. The sounds of the swamp would be created in the studio, or supplanted by music. Five days of rain delayed the shooting; then in five more days Renoir shot some swamp images for use in back projection, some shots for the opening scene of the film, with Dana Andrews and Trouble and some local inhabitants functioning as doubles, and, centrally, the scene of Ben searching the swamp for Trouble.

Far too much has been made of Renoir's brief excursion to Okefenokee, especially in France. Critics, there and elsewhere, have assumed that all the exteriors of *Swamp Water* were shot in Georgia. Jean-Luc Godard even claimed

that the location shots in *Swamp Water* eventually revolutionised Hollywood. But, despite Renoir's later interviews, location shooting was not that rare in Hollywood then, and there is very little location footage in *Swamp Water*. Of the film's 479 shots, only 24 were shot in Georgia. All the swamp scenes involving actors other than Andrews were shot in the studio, and the other exteriors at the Fox Ranch west of Los Angeles.

Still, the Okefenokee footage does give *Swamp Water* its most beautiful scene and the only one where we have five consecutive minutes of pure Renoir. In shooting Ben's search for Trouble, Renoir completely ignored Nichols' script, put his camera on a boat floating through the swamp with Ben, and created a scene which resembles in both beauty and form, though on a smaller scale, the woodcutter's walk into the forest in *Rashomon*. And, though it did not revolutionise Hollywood, Renoir's trip to Georgia did prove an important element in the commercial success of *Swamp Water*. The people of Waycross welcomed Renoir's crew, adopted the picture as their own and began a campaign to have the world premiere of *Swamp Water* in Waycross. Governor Eugene Talmadge proclaimed 23 October 1941 as 'Swamp Water Day' in Georgia and the gala premiere launched the film on a first run in the major cities of the south whose success rivalled that of *Gone With the Wind*.

Renoir returned to Hollywood on 6 July, with the studio shooting set to begin on 14 July. The Georgia trip had raised his spirits and his hopes. He wrote to Alain, 'I will have a happy two months.'

This illusion was quickly shattered. Renoir's letters sharply reflected his growing dismay with the Fox method of film-making:

20 July, to Saint-Exupéry: 'My first real contact with the American cinema has convinced me of the impossibility of bringing to it what little there may be of myself. I don't think I will make a bad film, but I am sure the result will be perfectly neutral, impersonal, odourless and conventional.'

21 July, to Dudley Nichols: 'I am not at all enthusiastic about my work at Fox. It consists in being seated in an armchair and saying "Action" and "Cut". It is useless to tire oneself out trying to present the scenes according to a personal conception, for everything is decided by Zanuck and when the rushes don't conform to his ideas he has the scene reshot. I ask you not to judge my work in America by this film, which will be Mr Zanuck's and not mine...'

'I would rather sell peanuts in Mexico than make films at Fox. I am not a eunuch and the joys of the harem do not constitute an ideal which can satisfy me... After this film I would like to find a quiet spot in the country where one can live cheaply and try to express my ideas by writing.'

22 July, to Ralph Blum: 'The first days of my work have surprised me a little. I have had to reconcile myself to the idea that the film director's profession is much more limited here than it is in France... I accept completely my situation. However I am not abandoning my idea of doing later what I did in France, that is, of being master of my story, of my screenplay and of my direction.'

After two weeks shooting the production was behind schedule, and a new cameraman had been assigned because the old one was thought responsible for the slowness. Renoir and Walter Huston had found an interpretation of Thursday Ragan that pleased them but not Zanuck, who insisted that Huston's performance be changed. Irving Pichel wrote to Renoir on 24 July, 'I think you are the best director I have ever known,' but Zanuck was not impressed. On 30 July he wrote to Renoir, 'You are going entirely too slow,' and enumerated Renoir's faults: he wasted too much time on details in the background; he moved his camera too much on dolly or tracks; he sometimes shot a scene in two different ways; he worried too much about atmosphere, background and other unimportant aspects of the film.

Finding that precisely those methods which had made his French films distinctive were now regarded as unacceptable, Renoir replied: 'This letter and our previous conversation about the acting of Walter Huston have made me feel that our association is a mistake, both for you and for me. The fact is that I have been too long in this profession to change the methods in which I have come to believe sincerely and which are adapted to my temperament... Since my method seems to be at such variance with your ideas, why prolong a collaboration which gives no enthusiasm to either of us?'

By 2 August, the production was five days behind schedule and Zanuck expanded his criticisms: Renoir wasted time by doing what 'no American director ever does', shooting scenes in different versions and by being indecisive about camera angles. And he encouraged altogether too much discussion on the set. Zanuck's instructions were that any discussion that occurred should be only between Renoir and Pichel, then they should act in unison.

3 August, Jean Renoir to Charles Boyer: 'I am managing very badly the work which Zanuck has assigned me. He wants me to make this film very quickly and to be content to execute only what is in the scenario, without anything contributed by me. Now that is a métier about which I know nothing. The result of this misapprehension with regard to my occupation is that I am making Zanuck desperate by my slowness. I wait from one moment to the next for him to dispense with my services, for which I wouldn't blame him at all.'

16 August, to Saint-Exupéry: 'I have never been as bothered in my life. I am afraid of having lost all enthusiasm for my profession, or rather, it's that the métier of cinema has become too old, too organised, too immobile and that it may require of its adepts a bureaucratic soul

that I have striven in vain to acquire.'

17 August, to Eugène Lourié: 'I would never have believed that one could come to detest his métier as I detest it now.'

A week later a Fox official suggested that Renoir might give up *Swamp Water* on the pretext of illness. His agents advised against this. About 25 August he was dismissed from the production, then quickly reinstated. On 4 September Renoir described this event to Dudley Nichols, in terms quite similar to his later account in *My Life and My Films* (p. 200). Then he detailed the aftermath: 'The last days of work passed in delicious peace. We have shown the film to Zanuck. The end displeased him and I think he is right. Our struggle and our crocodiles, shot in the studio in a false jungle with a little dirty water, was rather poor. [Renoir then proposed a new ending which Zanuck rejected.] Zanuck has given his ideas to Irving Pichel who has written an end conforming to his desires and who is now shooting it. I attend the shooting without intervening, for it is a question of simply executing the strict orders of Zanuck. I am content to give some indications to the actors, who are very nice and with whom I collaborate marvellously. It is a matter of four days of eight hours from morning to night and then I will be free. Zanuck is not a bad scenarist. He is logical and has a certain dramatic sense. But he lacks sensibility ... I have done good work with Ann Baxter and Dana Andrews.'

The shooting of *Swamp Water* ended, provisionally, on 8 September; then Renoir quickly learned that the editing, too, would be supervised by Zanuck. He reported the results to Nichols on 13 September: Zanuck had cut out the central scene between Ben and Tom Keefer in the swamp in which Keefer tells the story of the murder, and also other scenes which had shown the strange and powerful character that isolation in the swamp had made of Keefer. 'In spoiling the character I think the success of the film is compromised.' A new scene had to be shot on 12 September to fill the resulting gaps in the story. 'All this is replaced by a scene between Ben and Jesse Wick. During the scene Ben understands the Dorsons are the murderers. The scene is good, like all Zanuck's ideas which are good in themselves, but they destroy the films, bringing them back to an ingenious report of events.'

With the shooting finally over, Renoir and Zanuck quickly agreed to terminate Jean's contract. Renoir celebrated his freedom by going with Lucien Ballard to spend a few days in a totally different American environment, a Hopi Indian reservation in Arizona. He also sent a telegram to Gabrielle, now in New England from where she sent letters complaining about the wine, inviting her to come to California, 'It is just like southern France and they have good wine here.' In early October Gabrielle and her family arrived to stay with Jean and Dido for a month, displacing

Saint-Exupéry, who since early September had been writing *Flight to Arras* at the Renoir house. Together again, and at leisure, Jean and Gabrielle began those conversations about the past that became the origin of Renoir's later book about his father.

Jean was out of work, but a long period of unemployment seemed unlikely. Through the summer he and Nichols had corresponded about collaboration. For a while a cherished Nichols project seemed promising, *Hunky*, a story about a Hungarian workman in America, which Nichols had proposed to John Ford in 1936, but which Ford rejected. By mid-summer of 1941 Nichols was convinced that Jean Renoir was the greatest living film director and wrote to him about *Hunky*. Other projects discussed included a Brazilian story, *Magnificat*, which Dido had told Jean.

In September Renoir wrote to Nichols about his prospects. David Selznick was thinking of a three-part picture, with Capra, Hitchcock and Renoir each doing a part. Pare Lorentz had talked about making films in South America. Cary Grant had seen *La Chienne* and loved it and wanted Jean to remake it with Grant in the Michel Simon role. In November Renoir took up again the idea about children caught in the war which had been put aside in April with the rejection of *Flight South*. The fact that the hero of the first new sketch on this theme was named Gabriel Renard suggests that the presence of Gabrielle may have been instrumental in reawakening his interest. Through late November he wrote a series of sketches which would eventually lead to *This Land Is Mine*.

Also by November both Alain's recalcitrance and official obstacles had been removed and the prospects of son rejoining father seemed near realisation. Jean travelled to New York where, at an exorbitant cost, he secured Alain's passage to America. While in New York he was urged by Maximilien Becker, a French literary agent, to write a book about his father.

In early December the pain of working in the Fox studio was fading, perhaps helped by the commercial success of *Swamp Water*: Gabrielle was near; his family was being reunited; he had seen many facets of the United States and formed new friendships in the American film world. He wrote, 'As for me, I am beginning to understand and love this country.'

After the American declaration of war against Germany on 8 December, the Vichy government began to regard the United States, like Britain and the Free French, as an enemy, even though diplomatic relations continued until November 1942. On 27 December Marcel Achard, the French consul in Los Angeles, sent letters to Jean Renoir, René Clair, Julien Duvivier, Jean Gabin and Michèle Morgan demanding that they return to France and promising work for them making films in Vichy France. Though he had only vague prospects at that moment, Renoir remembered with distaste the call he had had in Cagnes in 1940 from Nazi cultural representatives

lauding the possibilities under the new order. He replied that he would be happy to make a film in France but unfortunately he had commitments for two films in Hollywood and it would be some time before he would be able to think about leaving.

Alain landed in New York on 26 December, predisposed to dislike America. A few days later he arrived in Hollywood, full of patriotic fervour, and announced to his father, who had waited more than a year for this reunion, that he would not stay long. In his brief time in New York he had visited the Gaullist headquarters and signed up to fight with the Free French. In the ensuing days Jean told Alain of his growing love for the USA; together they listened to Franklin Roosevelt speak. In mid-January, with Jean's blessing, Alain enlisted in the United States Army.

In June 1942 Jean wrote a sort of summary of his first year in America to his older brother Pierre, whose career in the French theatre kept him in the Occupied zone, making communication rare: 'I have begun a film, and here that's not a joke. You feel brusquely that you are a cog in a machine so big that you fear creating catastrophes by not giving every thought to the enterprise and risk stopping everything. [The Fox studio was] the type of big factory where one counts for nothing. What you have been able to do in life, the little personality you tried to acquire during your earlier work, doesn't count in face of the hard law of an organisation become inhuman by dint of being perfect. But while shooting that film I learned some important things. First I learned to love my American collaborators. You don't know how much the actors, the technicians and the workers have shown their friendship during hard moments of the work. As soon as the film was shot, I took advantage of my difficulties to break my contract with Fox. The result is I have been eight months without work. But I made enough money to stand it and, something much more precious, I had acquired good friends who are as devoted to me as I to them.

'Here everyone lives in a professional milieu. People judge you by the manner in which you exercise your métier and the way I work pleased the American professionals. It is that which saved me. On the set you have mostly old veterans. Now, with me, I have an electrician who began with D. W. Griffith. They have followed the evolution of the métier in their little corner, and the fact that they are with you or against you counts a great deal. I was lucky to have them with me ...

'The result of my experiences is that, quite apart from the cinema, the Americans and their country have quite conquered me. And after having passed through my first reaction due to the "Riviera" aspect of Hollywood, I have become very enthusiastic about California. One breathes easily here.' ■

GUERRILLA FIGHTER



MRINAL SEN

BY DEREK MALCOLM

Mrinal Sen has been making films for almost as long as Satyajit Ray—his first, *Raat Bhor (The Dawn)*, was released in 1956, some two months after *Pather Panchali*. He has now made eighteen, the last of which, *Akaler Sandhane (In Search of Famine)*, won a Silver Bear at this year's Berlin Festival.

Sen has taken many more years than Ray to achieve an international reputation and has more than once described his career as 'uncertain, erratic, desperate'. It is doubtful, for instance, whether he would have been able to pursue it at all without the example of Ray, his fellow Bengali; yet the two men could scarcely be more different in personality and outlook. While the superficially aloof Ray is often treated in India like some living monument, the ebullient, witty and occasionally flippant Sen is regarded as all too human—an unpredictable spirit whose radicalism, though not skin deep, is tinged with a constant awareness of the possibilities for hypocrisy. 'The moment you become a celebrity,' he has said, 'that is the time to defend yourself.'

Sen has often crossed dialectical swords with Ray, though they remain friends who agree to disagree. But, unlike

Ray, whom he much respects and honours, Sen has never quite come to terms with the uncomfortable fact that it is foreign, and particularly British, criticism that makes an Indian director's reputation, not just in the world at large but especially within India itself. He genuinely regrets this while having to feed on it. 'If I start making films for Europeans, I shall automatically cease to make them for Indians,' he argues.

As a Marxist, with no party affiliations and a marked distaste for party games, he knows there is a delicate balance to be struck between the admiration of the world and success in drawing a wider circle of Indians to his films. He has, in recent years, become more philosophical about that, recognising that, in a country as argumentative and fragmented as India, whatever he does will be criticised. Desperate he may still be after all his years of experience, but it is not the same desperation as before, when recognition was slow to come and the shadow of Ray over all other contemporary Indian film-makers was greater. 'I am now uncomfortably comfortable,' he says, 'and my desperation is to avoid being somehow defused.'

All Sen's films, even his most lightweight, have attacked, with undisguised horror and anger, the poverty, exploitation and inherent hypocrisy of Indian society. That is why he has remained a hero for so many of the young, who criticise Ray for a lack of overt political commitment and wish to see a truly revolutionary Indian cinema undiluted by European classicist and humanist sympathies. Yet, like Ray, he is certainly not a specifically Indian director whose films show no outside influences at work. In fact, it is almost impossible to talk with him—and he is an indefatigable talker—without constant reference to European, Russian and particularly English culture, often literary rather than cinematic. In some ways he resembles a kind of Bengali George Bernard Shaw, loquaciously defending his right to make jokes of serious things and serious things out of jokes.

Throughout his career he has unashamedly hopped from one outside influence to another in an attempt to clothe the content of his films in a form which will surprise and shock. He has sloganised, fantasised and parodied as well as presenting us with neo-realism, documentary and even Chekovian pastiche. But that is only the half of it. His films also show the seminal influence of a great deal of Indian popular and folk culture. He will beg, borrow or steal from anything to form an appropriately striking style and, for all that, still remain resolutely his own man. Latterly, the urge to confound and surprise has calmed somewhat—'I now know how simple a good film can look, and how difficult it is to be simple.' But he still adds: 'Let there be a little bit of madness and flippancy there too. Let there be a release of it up there on the screen.' Sen would absolutely loathe to be predictable, even predictably good. There is a perpetual smile on the face of this particular tiger, but those who might fear that it is toothless are badly mistaken.

As for content, Sen remembers Zavattini's words: 'It is untrue that we can't find reality. We are just afraid of it.' This, he says, is truer of India than of most places. 'People have always known what is happening. But they have always run from it. They don't ask questions for fear of the answers. I hate that eternal façade.' Nobody could accuse Sen of it. It is how he asks the questions that is controversial, and how he frames the answers. The madness up there on the screen is sometimes as difficult to contemplate as Ray's logic and sanity. Nevertheless, Sen is a remarkable director and one whose films even now have received too little recognition in the West. Last year's retrospective at the National Film Theatre, supported by a *Guardian* Lecture, did something to redress the balance. But it is more a comment on the lack of audacity and perhaps the financial constraints of the British 'art' cinema than on Sen's lack of

appeal that the season came only when he was in his third decade of film-making.

Sen's career can most conveniently be divided into three periods, each distinct in tone and capable of being separately analysed but, in hindsight at least, logically interrelated. He has never settled for one way of making films, and the twists and turns his work has taken are the direct result not only of a maverick personality but of a lifetime spent beating against so many brick walls before reaching the more or less secure plateau of general acceptance. It is not easy being a non-commercial film-maker in India and it is too often forgotten that the constant struggle is bound to leave its mark on the films themselves. To see an Indian film out of context is particularly difficult. And Sen's films need looking at in that light.

The first chapter, which starts with *The Dawn* in 1956 and ends with *Bhuvan Shome* in 1969, tells the story of a slow and not always sure development of artistic personality during which Sen not only rejected the conventional concerns of Indian cinema but also forged a style in distinct opposition to those of Ritwik Ghatak and Ray, the two Bengali directors who had also risen above the norm—and whom, incidentally, most concerned Indian film-makers were supposed in some way to emulate.

The second chapter, from *An Unfinished Story* (1971) to *Chorus* (1974), is the most dramatic—one during which a by now experienced director threw caution, and orthodox narrative cinema, to the winds in a laudable but finally abortive attempt to aid the makers of a revolution, in the arts as well as in life, which never came about. Sen became, in this period, very much the Indian Godard. And like Godard was finally rejected by many of those who had initially encouraged him.

The third chapter, which may or may not be complete (it depends upon whether one believes that Sen is capable of still further development), takes in *The Royal Hunt* (1976) to *In Search of Famine*. During it, Sen finally decided that a gentler kind of persuasion was necessary, that the narrative cinema still had value and that, without abandoning his radical concerns, he could and should appeal to a wider audience.

FORGING A VOICE

Sen was born in Calcutta in 1923 of respectable but certainly not rich middle-class parents. In his student days he was not particularly drawn to the cinema, despising Indian commercial films and unaware of much European film-making. More by accident than design, he studied sound technology in a film studio for a few months and then switched restlessly to freelance journalism (writing mostly for radical magazines). Subsequently, he joined the Indian People's Theatre Association, the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India. This led to an interest in film aesthetics and eventually an apprenticeship within the industry which resulted in his first film. *The Dawn* he now regards as a disaster, and one which he will neither show to

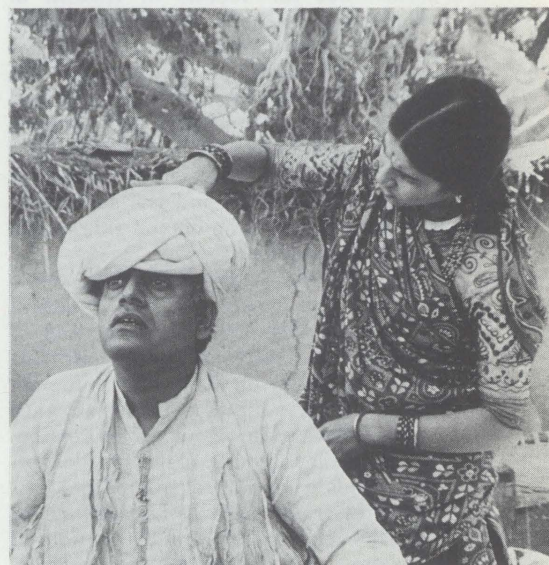
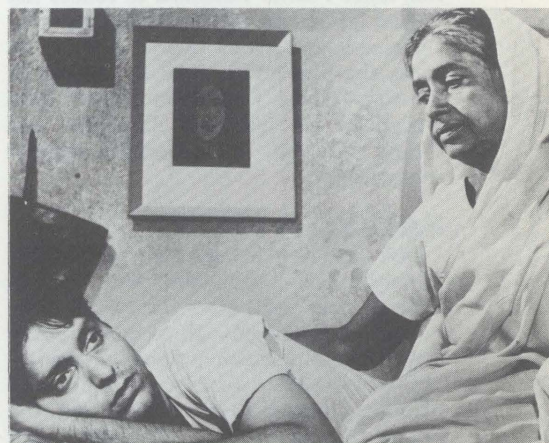
anybody nor talk about, save to say that, after it, he thought he had chosen the wrong profession. Another project was offered to him in 1959, however, and *Neel Akasher Neechey* (*Under Blue Skies*), the story of a Chinese hawk in India, made its mark at the box-office. Sen's own experience as a medical salesman in Uttar Pradesh may have made it ring true, as did the performance of Kali Banerjee in the central part.

This partial success led to *Baishey Sravana* (*The Wedding Day*), which looks and feels like the first real Sen film. It also shows the influence of Ray, but its story of a village salesman who marries a young girl and achieves a happiness that is gradually destroyed by the Bengal famine of 1943 is very different from Ray in tone. The film's characters seem more directly derived from a reality that owes nothing to literature, and rural poverty is shown to be the root cause of the couple's unhappiness, not their own contrasting temperaments. Famine, in fact, is in many senses the leading character. *Punascha* (*Over Again*, 1961) translated the socio-economic criticism into urban terms, as a woman who takes a job after marriage, to make family ends meet, comes up against the traditional concept of the pliant wife.

Sen's next two films, *Abasheshey* (*And At Last*) and *Pratinidhi* (*The Representative*) showed him to be still in search of a coherent style, with *nouvelle vague* influences jostling somewhat unconvincingly for supremacy over a more traditional approach. *And At Last's* comic flair was a pleasant surprise but its final sentimentality was not. *The Representative*—the story of the remarriage of a widow with a child—is simply a little dull.

It was *Akash Kusum* (*Up in the Clouds*, 1965) which caused the first major controversy of Sen's career. It was made shortly after he had seen Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* and its quota of freezes and jump cuts easily betrays the fact. Yet its story of a young man, who tries to break into the business world of Calcutta by dint of a good marriage, is gentle, charming and lively in turn. After a vaguely deflating review in the *Calcutta Statesman*, there followed a sharp passage of arms in the letter columns between Ray and Sen which eventually widened into a debate about form and content that excited much argument. Ray called *Up in the Clouds* a 'crow film' but Sen was unabashed. His next project, *Matira Manisha* (*Two Brothers*), which was shot in Orissa rather than Bengal and used the Oriyan language, did not abjure the *nouvelle vague* but built upon his practical application of it with frequent symbolism and even a dream sequence in negative. Panigrahi's novel of village life, in which two brothers quarrel over different attitudes to inherited land, was ripe for a typically Indian plethora of rural imagery. What it got was something extra—a fully contemporary view of a conventional story in which sensitive and self-conscious sequences seemed to alternate at will.

Bhuvan Shome was a landmark both for Sen, as his biggest success, and for India's Parallel Cinema, as the first low-



Top to bottom: the first real Sen film, 'The Wedding Day', 'Up in the Clouds', 'Bhuvan Shome', 'An Unfinished Story'.

budget film financed by the Government. It encouraged many to think that the path for subsidised 'art cinema' would be less stony than it turned out to be. Deprecatingly, and slightly facetiously, described much later by Sen as 'Big bad bureaucrat chastised by charmer's cheek,' the film confronted the educated middle class with the common people in a unique way. It was funny and haunting at the same time. Funny because the tenuous relationship between its two main characters, the high official and the young wife of a lowly clerk, succeeds in proving that education has nothing to do with shrewdness; and haunting because *Bhuvan Shome* seemed to be the first film since *Pather Panchali* to reflect the Indian landscape with both magical sensuousness and stern reality. As for its style, the film owed much to the values of story-telling Tagore would not have recognised as his own. Its logic was totally different, its modernism aggressively evident.

RAISING A VOICE

I have not seen *Ichnapur* (*Wish Fulfilment*), Sen's next film. But it soon became clear that, after *Bhuvan Shome*, he was confident enough to make totally over the political convictions that underpinned his earlier work. And the form of his films changed to suit the content; the initial inspiration was Eisenstein and Vertov, but the success of Godard in France was perhaps the most potent force. *An Unfinished Story*, set in the Depression years, depicted with the urgency of a newsreel the confused and violent struggle of workers and farmers against exploitation. It is watched by a middle-class cashier in a sugar mill set in an agricultural area, and the suggestion is that history will be on the side of the weak and the poor.

The Calcutta Trilogy which followed—*Interview*, *Calcutta '71* and *Padatik* (*Guerrilla*)—has often been accused of crude and derivative political pamphleteering. Yet none of the trilogy is merely that and each exhibits a further advance towards Brechtian rigour of expression. In *Interview*, a young man who desperately needs a job is prevented from getting an interview because he lacks a suit. Here the mode is satire and the method stylisation and fragmentary narration. The laughter generated, however, can only be bitter and the film ultimately fails because it seems a more liberating experience for its director than its audience (who at one point seem to address the young man in argument). Behind it is an attack on a way of life that clings to the last vestiges of bourgeois respectability and to a colonial past.

Calcutta '71 was an attempt in non-naturalist, agitprop terms to spell out basic problems of Indian society and to interpret the turbulence of the period with a proper regard for its long genesis. The 20-year-old central character becomes a timeless figure stalking through forty years of history—Sen says it could well have been a thousand years. Five separate incidents are recounted, all illustrating the debasing nature of grinding poverty, after which the young man explains how in the end change is created

only through violence. At the time Sen was making the film the Naxalites of Calcutta had rejected democracy and resorted to social upheaval. But, as the militant faction of the Communist Party, they were at odds with at least two other groups and the violence seemed as much directed against each other as against the forces of the establishment. Sen wanted to force the Left back to first principles and the film's 'dialectics of hunger'-generated considerable controversy.

A subsidiary text in *Calcutta '71* is the way Indian films treat poverty. 'We have always tried to make poverty respectable, dignified and even holy,' Sen has said. 'But this way nothing is disturbed. It is a trait of our films, and even Ray has succumbed to it. *Calcutta '71* shows how from resignation and callousness people move to cynicism and beatenness and self-destruction. Then comes anger and violence, which is more creative. If you asked me what effect the film had, what effect any film can have, I do not know. But it was my way of intervening.'

Padatik (*Guerrilla* or *The Guerrilla Fighter*) took a further step by attempting to analyse the fracture of the Left. It was a particularly brave film since any discussion of the activities of 'extremists' that was not wholly negative was seldom given space in the press, and film censorship, though not at its worst, was still a problem to be reckoned with, as much on a political level as any other. 'We had arrived at a point (1973) when the Left was lying low and in disarray, and at a time when there was a need for unceasing self-criticism,' Sen has said. 'That is why the protagonist in the film, a young "extremist" who has escaped from the police and is sheltered by a woman, has unshaken faith in the party even though he questions its leadership and direction. He recognises the fact that, as the Left fights the establishment, it tends to become part of it. I wanted to make a disturbing and annoying film, not an artistic one. And it did disturb and annoy because it told the truth about the Left while remaining firmly against the Centre and the Right. The fact that it was made with establishment money didn't compromise me in the least—any more than if it had been made by a commercial company. The Government didn't really mind. There is a kind of repressive tolerance among the bourgeois countries which is a new kind of sophistication. They use you. But you can also use them.'

Chorus (1974) was the last of Sen's agitprop films and certainly his most liberated in technique. It begins like a fantasy and juxtaposes stylisation, neo-realism, documentary. Pudovkin (*Storm Over Asia*), Godard and Brecht come to mind, but the flavour is quintessentially Sen—demanding that today's revolutionary fantasies become tomorrow's reality. The Gods, entrenched in their fortress, create a hundred jobs for the people but the people need a thousand. A chorus of traditional singers (generally used to glorify the status quo) is used to tell the story and provide the message. The film works symbolism and allegory almost to death but it still has life, interest and an anger one can't deny.

Sen has described this and the Calcutta Trilogy as 'shock therapy' and admits that this mode of film-making eventually restricted his public. If the films were tracts for the day, they were also extremely bold experiments in political film-making in a part of the world where there had been no real radical tradition. He had, he says, got the passion to do away with conventional narrative as much from literary and theatrical sources as from the cinema, and cites Aldous Huxley, James Joyce and Peter Weiss as significant influences. He believes that they too were practitioners of 'aggressive infiltration' but that the public cannot be ignored—'you must talk to them in a language they can understand and at least partly on their terms.'

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Sen's five most recent films have not betrayed what went before. In essentials, he remains the same man—a film-maker willing to try anything to underline his social and political purposes. But as he grew more famous outside India—and it is instructive to note that by the mid-70s he had become better known in France than in England—he seemed less anxious to astound and more aware of the need to please. *Mrigaaya* (*The Royal Hunt*) was made in 1976 during the Emergency and, with its luxurious colour photography, certainly did that. But it was also another brave parable, invested with the humour that he had suppressed while making the Trilogy. Dealing with the Santhal Revolt of 1901, during which a tribal hunter became a revolutionary martyr, the film won a host of awards. But its equation of colonialism with paternalist tyranny and lack of understanding could easily be taken as a comment on the excesses of the Emergency too.

The Telugu film *Oka Oorie Katha* (*The Outsiders*, sometimes called *The Story of a Village*) returns more gauntly to Sen's constant theme of poverty and the exploitation of Indians by Indians. Taken from a short story by the noted Hindi and Urdu writer Prem Chand, the film explores a world of ultimate poverty through the agency of a father and son who live in a village hut but refuse to work for the local landlord. When the son gets married, the pair try to change their ways. But the effort is too much for them. The girl dies in childbirth when they refuse to summon the local midwife, and the last pages of Prem Chand's story (*Kafan*, or *The Shroud*) have the father borrowing money to pay for her burial and then drinking it away in the local liquor shop.

Sen changes the final scene to a shot of the old man under a tree holding fast to the money and shouting a typically angry lament: 'It is the fools who work hard for the rich. It is the landlord who grows fat like a buffalo. Give us two sacks of rice, clothes instead of loincloths, a house instead of a hut. And give us our dead girl back to life.' He sees the story not as about a dehumanised animal who refuses to let his son live decently with his wife and then destroys her. 'It is much more the history of someone who has seen what life is and who fights against it

with all the bitterness of long experience.'

The direct appeal of this film, merciless in its realism right up to the final sequence, was not repeated with *Parashuram* (*Man with the Axe*), though this was the first film ever to be made about the street dwellers of Bombay. Somehow its blend of fantasy, allegory and social reality proved an uneasy mix for Indian audiences. Parashuram was a mythical hero who avenged his father's death by raising his axe twenty-one times; but here he is a simple rural migrant, of whom many thousands arrive in India's major cities every week and who live in fear not only of authority but of the petty crooks who feed off them, often organising them into beggars' cartels. The migrant tries to scrape a living like his fellows but in the end makes an abortive gesture of defiance which leads to his death. The film is a rather glorious mix of different styles, much more convincingly intermingled than Sen's earlier *Interview*, for instance. And the mode of telling its story has intriguing affinities not so much with other films but with the fairground story-telling tradition of rural India.

Ek Din Prati Din (*And Quiet Rolls the Dawn*, 1979), one of the very few Sen films given a London run, reaches out for a wider audience and seems more subtle the more you know about the frequently poverty-stricken but determinedly respectable Indian petit bourgeois. Set in Calcutta, in a drab tenement that used to be a colonial building, it follows the trauma of one such family whose favoured daughter fails to return home one evening. At first the family believes that she has been abducted or killed in an accident or even murdered (such things are commonplace in Calcutta). Then comes the realisation that she has probably simply spent the night with a man, though we never know. From acute anxiety, the family's feelings degenerate into outrage and anger before the realisation comes that the girl is, after all, an adult and can do what she likes with her life.

'When love and compassion finally returns to these people,' says Sen, 'a new value is created. That is a value that is diametrically opposed to middle-class prudery and the conformism that so afflicts Indian society. I have spoken about it often: it is in *Bhuvan Shome*, *Calcutta '71* and *The Guerrilla Fighter*. But here I have tried to focus the whole film upon it—virtually the only time we leave the house is when members of the family search the hospitals and morgues. It is a claustrophobic atmosphere into which, at the very last moment, something more healthy breaks in. Many people have asked me—did the girl sleep with a man, or did she not? That I regard as totally unimportant. The fact is that she is an independent woman, and it doesn't matter. I badly wanted to make a film about the ruthlessness of the lives lived by the lower middle classes, to understand their desire to conform and become respectable. I did not want to condemn them but, if I may say so, I wanted to piss in the face of such decency. And the story had to be as straightforward as possible because I felt

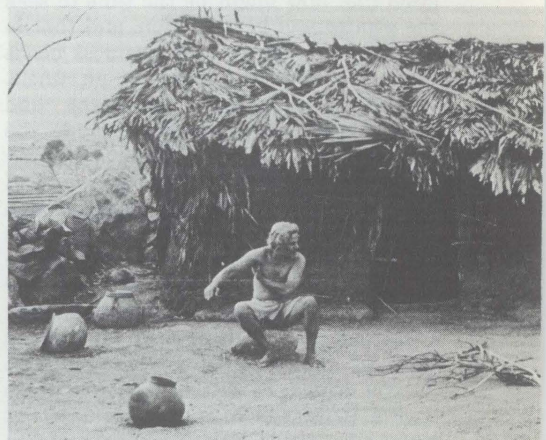
that the slightest overstatement would falsify and destroy it. We had twenty-one days in which to shoot the film and I think we all grew with it. It is not a film of which I would claim sole authorship, but more than most a co-operative effort.'

This applies more and more to Sen's later films. He likes to travel with his cast and technicians to wherever he is making his film and to live closely with them while preparing and shooting. He generally has a prepared script but, as often as not, alters it as the shooting progresses. He feels less need than ever to be the man in command of a project and insists more on teamwork and argument and 'living the experience of making a film together.'

This is certainly what he did with *In Search of Famine*, which has a film crew travelling into a rural area to relive with the villagers their experience of a former famine. By the end, the impossibility of doing this without patronising them or engendering hostility strikes even the po-faced and patently sincere director. And the film crew decamps with its corporate tail between its legs. The film within the film was perhaps constructed for Sen to warn himself of the perils of the process of film-making itself, and the need to respect the subjects of his stories. He seems, at any rate, to feel more responsibility than before rather than less. That responsibility is honed by the undeniable fact that he is now regarded as one of the Third World's most experienced radical film-makers, from whom much is expected yet who has always admitted that film-making for him is a constant experiment and never an even progress.

He is now accused by some of selling out to the Indian establishment, of using its money to gain the applause of all those who would like to see Satyajit Ray joined by another director the outside world can honour. Perhaps there is a little truth in this. Sen has sometimes seemed in recent years to want to be all things to all men. Yet he has never reneged on his fundamental principles, and as an elder statesman of the Indian cinema, he remains a constant provocation to officialdom and to those who seek, in embracing him, to strip him of his more dangerous and incendiary powers. He tends to come out fighting just when they think they are lying down with a lamb. He is also the idol of a great many of the bolder and younger spirits and has not betrayed them. Nor has he ever adopted the pose of a leader who knows better than they what radical cinema should be about.

What comes over from a study of his work is not that he is a director of great films, monuments to world or even Indian culture, but that, often against considerable odds, he has traced the social and political ferment of India with greater resilience and audacity than any other contemporary Indian director. That may be why a knowledge of India is almost mandatory before his work can be appreciated to the full. Without that knowledge, Sen appears a more uneven and less coherent director than he is. With it, his achievement seems very considerable indeed. ■



Sen in the 70s. Top to bottom: 'Chorus', 'The Royal Hunt', 'The Outsiders', the family in 'And Quiet Rolls the Dawn'.



'The Postman Always Rings Twice': Jessica Lange and Bob Rafelson.

PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS

At the beginning of *Stay Hungry*, its recently orphaned and indecisive hero, Craig Blake, is chided in a voice-over letter from his Uncle Albert, who suggests that now might be the time to seek the comforts of his tradition, and that in any case the family steel business needs him. Bob Rafelson also has an uncle, Samson Raphaelson, playwright and screenwriter, whose credits include the original *Jazz Singer*, Lubitsch's *Heaven Can Wait* and Hitchcock's *Suspicion*. 'I never connected with this man through my own family, but I met him through my ex-wife. He immediately owned me as a relative: if he was pleased with my work I was a nephew, if he was displeased I was a remote cousin. So I sent him a copy of the script for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and he wrote me back a letter which said, "You dare not make this movie unless you're going to tell it in the first-person narrative. There's no way people can be sympathetic to this character unless you proclaim his destiny at the outset." I hear his voice. And I disagreed, and tried to tell it with all the feelings and ambivalences played between the lines. The challenge for me was to make us understand something about these people without the benefit of the first-person narration. But I recognised the problem, and I was certainly alerted to it by my Uncle Samson. Actually, I think I'm a cousin again.'

This is life following art, which in Rafelson's career generally seems to have become a fierce pursuit. In London for the opening of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, he mused on how his films have only been appreciated outside his own country, where they can scarcely even be seen. This makes him a kind of

BOB RAFELSON
interviewed by
Richard Combs and
John Pym



Jack Nicholson as Frank.

orphan as sad and privileged—in that, every three or four years, he is still able to come back with his own kind of film—as Craig Blake. In the case of *Postman*, American critics have been quick to follow the example of Uncle Samson, disowning Rafelson and his version of James M. Cain's much-filmed novel. The final twist in this tale is that Rafelson, unlike his archetypal protagonist from *Five Easy Pieces* through *The King of Marvin Gardens* to *Stay Hungry*, was actively seeking the comforts of tradition in *Postman*. 'It seemed time for me to try my hand at something classical. I'd like to work faster. I never believed I was capable of making a *Postman* before I

did it.' Not that he is likely to have softened towards the Hollywood system in the process. Immediately before, he had fallen out with 20th Century-Fox and been fired from the Robert Redford prison movie, *Brubaker*.

BOB RAFELSON: Apparently I'm not suited to make movies for studios. The lawsuit over *Brubaker* is still on. It's more than a contest between a director and a studio for me, it's a moral thing. With *Postman*, we simply took the idea of Jack Nicholson and myself doing the novel to Lorimar, and they said they'd like to do it. I said, but no approvals of the screenplay, the actress; and they said, that's fine, go ahead. Since I had just come from this nightmare with Fox, the idea of being left alone, the way I had been in the past, was very comfortable. MGM had owned the property from the outset. Visconti had purloined it during the war, but MGM still retained the rights, and they released it without any participation whatsoever. I think at one point Hal Ashby and Jack talked about it, and then Raquel Welch was imposed on the project. They were going to do a present-day version, in about 1972.

I originally brought the idea to Jack ten years ago. But I didn't bring the idea of making the movie so much as just seeing it, the John Garfield version. I thought that Jack's background, and the kind of parts he was trapped into playing, the anti-heroic postures, were somewhat allied to Garfield's history. I was suggesting that Jack should study up on Garfield, but he misinterpreted this and thought that I wanted to make *Postman*. So when he called me a decade later, he didn't understand why I didn't want to make it. He said, you were the one who

turned me on to it, why don't you look at the book? So I read the book and went to see the movie the following day. About three-quarters of the way through I just said, well they didn't do the Cain novel.

A number of things attracted me to the project, not least of which was personal despair. I had just been fired, and was overjoyed that there might be something I would like to do. I was attracted to doing something that had a very powerful story. I don't know what I missed, but the American critics seemed to feel that Cain's narrative eluded me. There's apparently an irony they were all attracted to, which is the fact that Frank goes through a second trial. I didn't see the necessity for that. If indeed the relationship of Frank and Cora was transcendent of sex, if it moved from sex into some kind of love story, then there was no greater tragedy than his losing the woman to whom he had finally capitulated. He had joined the middle classes in a way. At the very end, Cora suggests to him that maybe they should sell the café, which is a complete turnaround for her. He says, no, it's a good place for raising children and pets. She in turn has yielded to something more important than the ownership of the café, and is now prepared to leave. The fact that they have both come to this place, then she dies, that seemed to me the overwhelming tragedy.

I'd almost forgotten by this time that they had done this horrible murder. There was a kind of purge; it was almost as if they themselves wished that they had never committed the crime, even as they committed it. Jack's performance, and Jessica Lange's, is very complex, for me, at the moment of the crime. At once it's an abhorrence and a kind of tantalising thing. So I was a little taken aback that people should wonder why I didn't put in the second trial. I was so moved by the plot. There's something about the irony of two people who are caught by passion to begin with, and then transcend it, but can't elude the karma of their passion. That was definitely very attractive to me.

They also seem so completely inane, these two characters, Frank and Cora. They're so stupid. To think that they were going to plot two murders, so ineptly. You can imagine the two of them plotting it. I took out the plotting and just allowed you to see what they were doing. The fact is that all the transitions are missing in the film. But you sense that—first of all, if Frank won the money in the craps game, he could have taken off on his own—he's completely hung up on Cora. They escalate each other's thoughts all the time. Neither of them is capable of doing anything that audacious, or even conceiving of their lives as anything but what they are, without the other. They can't complete their sentences, in fact, without each other. They're equal partners in their crime and their adultery and their murder and their love for each other. They really attain a kind of equality in the process.

The murder plot is almost silly, but it's dictated by the level of their intelligence. This attracts me to them actually, because there are no super-sleuths here

or super-criminals. Cain never wrote about very intelligent criminals. He is completely apart from the people he's usually lumped together with, Hammett and Chandler. He was an altogether different writer. He claimed he could never finish a Hammett novel, and I think he said the same thing about Hemingway. Maybe he was a closet reader. It's hard to tell because Cain was filled with disdain for every kind of contemporary American fiction, a very resentful man. I think he has been somewhat neglected, if not forgotten, for twenty years. There seems to be a tremendous revived interest in Cain novels and movies.

His *Postman* is heavy on the plot side, but it's the kind of plotting that was very comfortable to work with. There are sort of inside things that appealed to me—the idea that everything happens twice. I don't know whether Cain actually intended this, it feels almost as if it were something undiscovered by himself. But in the process he somehow alludes to almost everything twice. What was more interesting to me, perhaps, than the detailed plotting up to the trial was what becomes of two people after they have committed a crime, and betrayed one another. How do they live with each other? In that part I allowed my own consciousness to run a little bit to itself as opposed to the novel. The courtroom scenes are a little elliptical, but if you actually sit down and read the novel, the trial doesn't make any sense. I read it a thousand times, trying to figure out, how did these people get off? When David Mamet and I wrote the script, I brought in some lawyers to check it out. They said, we don't understand what the hell happened, but it made perfect sense.

Subsequent to that, I did expand somewhat. For every movie I've made, I've had a hundred possibilities for the ending. In *Postman*, there was a whole scene, which was in the novel, where Frank and Cora go bathing together. She's still vaguely suspicious and putting him to a test. But two weeks before shooting the scene, I decided to eliminate it. Instead I managed to get in her miscarriage just by having her put up the convertible top. The same thing happened in *The King of Marvin Gardens*. The ending of that movie was dictated by the fact that the actress playing the young girl went slightly bats. Near the end, there was a long scene, almost a stage scene, where Bruce Dern is packing to go to Hawaii, and Nicholson has come back to confront him with the fact that he's utterly deluded, once again. Ellen Burstyn is meanwhile wandering around saying, I've got this idea, why don't you take her to Hawaii? The girl is supposed to be there, but just before that scene, the night before, the actress Julia Anne Robinson cut off all her hair. All the actors had become completely enmeshed in their parts, and because the girl's mother, Ellen Burstyn, had cut her hair off earlier in the film, she had decided to do the same. So I had to lock her in the bathroom and rewrite the scene.

In the last scene of the picture, as I had scripted it then, Nicholson was delivering a Volkswagen commercial. But it was sort of abstract, he was talking

philosophically about motors and cars, so you weren't sure that it wasn't a monologue like those he had dictated previously into the cassette machine. Then you discovered that he was a disc jockey in Hawaii. He walks to the window and sees the young girl with some new lover. And you get the feeling that he has inherited his brother's aspirations. This was the way it was scripted, that he was in Hawaii, albeit doing a slightly different kind of job, but somehow or other Hawaii was his destiny. Originally, *Five Easy Pieces* ended with Nicholson and the girl in the car. They were kissing each other, he swerved and the car went off the road, exactly in fact as *Postman* ends. Except that in *Five Easy Pieces* he killed himself. She was out, walking along the embankment as the car went under water and bubbles came up. He didn't surface, and she looked back at the accident and said, 'Oh Bobby, you son of a bitch,' and walked down the highway by herself. That was the end of the movie, which I thought was too suicidal, so I changed it. I didn't know what the end would be until the day before I shot it, and for a production company that's pretty maddening.

I think every director, at some time or another, wants to make a movie about what it's like to direct. If I were to do it, it would have to be a comedy, and my model would be Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*, which has always been a favourite movie of mine. Perhaps I would use my adventures in the Amazon. I've made two major research forays, one to West Africa and the other in the Amazon. I was researching a slave trade story, based on a novel by Peter Matthiessen, *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*, which is about confrontation between missionaries and mercenaries, industry and the army, playing round a kind of noble savage concept of the Indian. I travelled more than two thousand miles in the Amazon, and I finally visited some Indians whom no white man had seen. I had overflown the village earlier so I had to walk in, and I had to make it before nightfall because there were all kinds of beasts in the water that gobble you up. I was singing at the top of my lungs, 'The hills are alive . . .', lest these Indians think I was creeping up on them. Then the very first one leapt out on to the path, and I had to determine whether or not he was hostile. He had needles sticking out of his face, and tattoos all over his face and body, and he was making guttural, click-click sounds way back in his throat. He turned out to be the only Indian in the tribe who had a cleft palate.

I'll probably never make the movie. I'm not even sure that I want to make it. It would somehow be anticlimactic to my own personal adventures. Nothing could be as crazed, as bizarre, as somebody like myself in the middle of the Amazon. I suspect the whole thing would be lessened if I made a movie out of it, it's sort of exploiting a lifetime experience. Nothing wrong with that, mind you, because I've done it in all my movies. The other thing is that I suspect everything you learn comes up some time, sooner or later. But I certainly wouldn't make it for any studio. ■

Sturges' Folly: the fate of

E. Rubinstein discusses the audacity and the failure

A favourite scene of all followers of Preston Sturges is the interchange between the director Sullivan and two studio executives at the beginning of *Sullivan's Travels*. The subject under discussion is the kind of movie the public wants to see, a subject which, we soon learn, can provoke nonsense (albeit inspired nonsense: 'It died in Pittsburgh.' ... 'What do they know in Pittsburgh?' 'They know what they like.' 'If they knew what they liked, they wouldn't live in Pittsburgh'), or cliché ('a comment on modern conditions', 'stark realism', etc), or empty verbal melodramatics ('grim death gargling at you from every corner'), or, when called for, sheer lying in order to score a point. The dialogue is primarily memorable for the vigour with which the participants counter absurdity with absurdity, but I wonder if Sturges isn't also illustrating the grander absurdity of supposing that there finally exists any single reliable standard by which to judge what the public will or will not buy.

If the Mayers and the Zukors and the Cohns knew what their audiences wanted—and notwithstanding their many celebrated, costly errors, they knew—so too, by very different processes of understanding, did the man who succeeded in selling to the American public of the war years those endlessly ambiguous anatomies of the mentality of patriotism, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. One of Sturges' great insights, an insight shared by Josef von Sternberg in his Dietrich movies, was that everybody likes being in on a secret: both film-makers, however dissimilar otherwise, built their popular success at least in part on the principle of letting the public realise that their

films were going too far. But there came a point, for Sternberg with *The Scarlet Empress* and *The Devil Is a Woman*, for Sturges, it would appear, with *Unfaithfully Yours*, when both made the inevitable error of going too far for the public to follow.

I bring all this up because anyone speaking of *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948), the last but one of Sturges' Hollywood films, must sooner or later attempt to reconcile its joyous originality with its failure to do much business. (Its very originality—its defiance of the powers of genre—may have been part of the problem.) *Unfaithfully Yours* tells us, and in the familiar loud Sturges voice, that it flouts our powers to resist it, that it will make a million: why in 1948 did so few hear? Because it is worth asking, I'll construct this article around that question; but because such a question can never really be answered, I begin with the solemn reminder that, as much as the shiftily producers and rather dim-witted director in *Sullivan's Travels*, and as much as any socio-historian of American film, I am limited by my own way of seeing movies.

1 Sturges' irreverence went too far

Hollywood in the middle 1940s seized upon the lives of 'serious' composers and virtuosi, actual and fictional, as the subject of a number of successful movies, thereby furnishing us with some of the

most dementedly overstated visions in our collective movie memory. In order to establish the context in which the public naturally viewed *Unfaithfully Yours*, I have to pause to revive some of these memories.

Item: Imperious Merle Oberon (George Sand: bad news) and twitchy Paul Muni (Professor Elsnor: good news) squabbling over the body and soul of Cornel Wilde (Chopin: no news at all) in *A Song to Remember*. At one point Oberon, gone bug-eyed in her desperation to seduce Frédéric from his commitment to the cause of Polish independence, hisses directly into his ear the assurance that 'No one knows this human jungle better than I'—thus presumably preventing the poor tormented muscle-bound clod from turning out yet another hateful mazurka or polonaise.

Item: In another *Song* movie, this one of *Love*, Clara Schumann as impersonated by Katharine Hepburn. She sacrifices her own career in order to serve the needs of her Robert (Paul Henreid), but despite the exorbitance of her gesture Robert elects to do his mad scene before her and our eyes. In the image I recall most vividly, Clara is revealed to us in the ultimate dignity of total self-abnegation, before a tub performing the rite of laundry. And as if life weren't taxing enough, she is obliged all through this to resist the attentions of Robert Walker, a man her children cheerfully allude to as 'Uncle Brahms'.

Item: Joan Crawford, in *Humoresque*, omnivorous patroness of young male artists, a woman so sophisticated/depraved that we must wonder if it is only brandy she inhales from her massive snifters. At one point she explains to John Garfield,



Lionel Stander, Robert Greig, Rudy Vallee, Barbara Lawrence.



Rex Harrison as orchestra conductor.

'Unfaithfully Yours'

of Sturges' penultimate Hollywood film

fresh (but leathery) from the Lower East Side, that martinis are 'an acquired taste'. She is generous enough to clarify: 'like Ravel'. Abandoned at the end, she walks into the sea. Her radio seconds her decision with the *Liebestod*—but in a rather odd arrangement for violin, piano and orchestra so as to accommodate the presence in the film of fiddler Garfield and of that ubiquitous musical sidekick, Oscar Levant.

Item: Bette Davis, Claude Rains and, once again, Paul Henreid in *Deception*. Davis is the mistress of Rains—that is, of Hollenius, the world's very greatest living composer. Her former lover, presumed perished in the war, makes a sudden reappearance. He is a cellist. She chooses cellist over composer. Composer crushes a champagne glass in his bare hand at the wedding reception, then decides to give Henreid the première of his new cello concerto, intending to sabotage the performance and so bring Henreid to disgrace. To salvage Henreid's career, Davis must shoot Rains dead, even as the applause for Henreid's playing of the concerto (Erich Korngold's most extravagant gift to Hollywood) rings in the ear of the world. A monstrous close-up of Davis' face ends the film. Now awaiting arrest, she hears a gushing female voice assure her that she must be the 'happiest woman in the world': Davis' expression teaches us that only passions as absolute as those she has demonstrated can give birth to ironies this grandiose. Thanks to this sublimely silly operatic plot, and thanks to Davis and Rains, Hollywood's lunatic version of the life of musicians is transported to a point beyond which no points have been charted.

All these movies, and more like them, appeared between 1945 and 1947. In 1948, 20th Century-Fox released *Unfaithfully Yours*. This is the scenario: a celebrated British conductor (Rex Harrison) is persuaded by a detective in the employment of his brother-in-law (Rudy Vallee) that in his absence his much younger wife (Linda Darnell) has spent at least one night with his handsome male secretary. In the course of a Carnegie Hall concert, the conductor imagines three ways of dealing with the situation. During Rossini's overture to *Semiramide*, he conceives an elaborate scheme to do away with his wife (the scheme depends on the crafty manipulation of a 'Simplicitas Home Recording' unit); in the Pilgrims' Chorus section of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* overture, he forgives her, and then, by means of a handsome cheque, underwrites her voyage to a world of such love as he himself can't provide; Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* provokes a fantasy of Russian roulette that ends in his own death. After the performance, the conductor rushes home to try to enact the first of his imagined scenes. The result is a ludicrous botch. The fantasies of pardon and of Russian roulette work out no more neatly. In the end, the wife explains away the supposed evidence of her faithlessness and the conductor accepts her word.

If all the films described above were animated by a spirit of wild hyperbole, *Unfaithfully Yours* is controlled by an ineluctable impulse to ironic deflation, with Sturges himself serving as Iago to the conductor-Othello figure by systematically reducing the latter's every grand gesture of passionate jealousy to spluttering impotence. The film comes across as

an attempt—what is more, and what must have been worse, a thoroughly successful attempt—to subvert the rhetorical premises of a then popular kind of movie. The public, which had presumably given its faith to the likes of *Humoresque* and *Deception*, was less than pleased.

It has been suggested that the 'black humour' of Sturges' film was ahead of its day. Perhaps; but perhaps what the public finally objected to was not so much the merciless slashing of Linda Darnell as the merciless slashing of its own presumptions about the way star conductors were meant to behave in movies in 1948. It is one thing for a movie musician to murder his faithless wife in a fit of passion—in certain of the movies I've described, it would have seemed the only logical thing to do—but when in the first, fantasised version of the slaying, the act is planned with the most scrupulous forethought and executed with icy glee, and then when in the second half of the film the attempt at the playing out of the fantasy murder robs the conductor of any hint of personal dignity, let alone of sexual allure—that may have been asking for a reversal of assumptions and a shift in allegiance which viewers of the time found themselves unwilling to risk.

It isn't that the public was not prepared to laugh at the more easily identifiable excesses of the musical world: *A Night at the Opera* is evidence enough. But Marx Brothers comedies don't give us Rex Harrison as our conductor and Linda Darnell as his wife, set them up in luxurious Fox sets and dress them in Fox finery, proclaim Harrison's passion for his wife while allowing the possibility that Darnell may be less than chaste, and



Russian roulette: Kurt Krueger, Linda Darnell, Rex Harrison.

then ask us to laugh at the consequences. What we have in *Unfaithfully Yours* is not the ironic redefinition of a genre (as in *The Lady Eve* and *The Palm Beach Story*, with their redefinition of screwball comedy) but rather a heartless parody; we have, for the first time in Sturges' career, true satire, with the public in a sense its object. The bond between filmmaker and audience was betrayed.

2 The audience missed the central joke

But then, *Unfaithfully Yours* had a good deal more going against it. The characterisation of the protagonist is audacious to the point of folly: Sturges gives us as our central figure—a figure so central indeed that much of the action of the film takes place inside his head—a man whose controlling interests appear to be (i) the alleged lusts of Linda Darnell and (ii) the possibilities of his own savage wit. The old problem of distinguishing between 'laughing at' and 'laughing with' is exacerbated as in few films I know, for the one Sturges figure *consciously* as verbally stunning as his or her creator, the one Sturges figure capable of delivering a line like 'Now, my dear August, what happy updraft wafts you hither?' *knowing* how it sounds, is at the same time the victim of some of Sturges' most devastating ironies. And the public's uneasiness could hardly have been assuaged by the casting of Rex Harrison as the conductor: maybe someone else might have succeeded in neutralising the character to some saving degree, but surely not Harrison, heretofore known to the wider American audience in the exotic guises of a Siamese king, a New England ghost, and a Southern rakehell.

For all this, I've only hinted at the ultimate inaccessibility of the Harrison character, for *Unfaithfully Yours* is very much a film *à clef*. At one point Rudy Vallee, Harrison's endlessly stuffy brother-in-law, announces to him that he's 'embarrassed about the product your family made its money out of.' 'I am a baronet,' replies the conductor, 'I am a bandleader, and my family's product has kept England on time since Waterloo.' Where's the source of the embarrassment? The joke is incomprehensible except with respect to the fact (never again alluded to in the film) that the most celebrated, the most determinedly outrageous of actual English conductors inherited his fortune from manufacturers of laxative pills. In sum, without specific reference to Sir Thomas Beecham many implications of the Harrison figure and much of the fun of the film are lost. The conductor's very name partakes of the central joke, for Sturges bestows on the character modelled on the heir to Beecham's Pills the label of Sir Alfred de Carter. The 'Carter', at least to an American audience weaned on the euphemistically identified 'Carter's Little Liver Pills', would have called for no explanation (just as the priceless

'de' would have brooked none), but how many in Sturges' audience would even have understood that the name itself was part of the game, or indeed that this kind of game was in progress?

Like any good Sturges character, Thomas Beecham was (at least in his own version of his life), despite the considerable wealth to which he was born, obliged to carve out his own success. And so, according to his autobiography, *A Mingled Chime* (it appeared in 1943, early enough for Sturges to have submerged himself in its style), he entered the active professional world of music 'armed' with two traits that instantly evoke Sturges' Sir Alfred: 'a reservoir of stored-up energy and a belligerency of utterance of which I had not hitherto suspected the possession.' Beecham, of course, became as famous for his lethal tongue as for his baton, and for half a century the purveying of Beecham anecdotes was an activity of inexhaustible profit to writers on music. To be sure, much of the best of Beecham is too sacrilegious or too scatological for any movie governed by the Production Code, but to the extent available Sturges reproduces to perfection Beecham's public manner. And for Sturges, *Unfaithfully Yours* must have served as a marvellous challenge to imitate and equal the fierce maestro's verbal style. The degree of Sturges' success may be gauged by Sir Alfred's answer to the question of why he conducts from a score rather than from memory: 'Because I can actually read music.' I have seen this quotation ascribed to Beecham himself (intended as a dig at Toscanini), and I have not succeeded in determining whether Sturges stole it from Beecham or whether it wafted naturally out of *Unfaithfully Yours* into the public domain of Beechamiana; my point is that such a remark would be exactly as characteristic of Sir Thomas as of Sturges' Sir Alfred. (In Beecham's case the line happens to be misleading: like Toscanini, Beecham generally preferred to conduct without a score, but this minor point of mere fact would have kept neither Sir Thomas nor Sir Alfred away from so tempting a *boutade*.)

In the course of a rehearsal of the Rossini, the cymbalist produces a sound too genteel for Sir Alfred's taste. 'Dr Schultz,' says Sir Alfred, 'yours is my favourite instrument in the entire orchestra. I've been looking at you but I can't hear you.' Schultz (Torben Meyer, one of

Sturges' beloved ravagers/enrichers of the English tongue) answers, 'I was afraid of being a little loud, Sir Alfred. You know, vulgar.' Sir Alfred: 'Be vulgar by all means but let me hear that brazen laugh.' Dr Schultz exits, only to return with a monstrous pair of cymbals, therewith creating at the appropriate moments in the score sounds so stupendously 'vulgar' as to stun even Sturges or Beecham, and Sir Alfred explodes into laughter as demonically 'brazen' as any the movies have heard.

Sturges' natural fascination with Beecham gives rise to one of the great Hollywood comedies. What is more, that bundle of repressed physical violence, that verbal tornado, that fabricator of outlandish scenarios, Sir Alfred de Carter, is the nearest thing in all Sturges' films to that bundle of repressed physical energy, that verbal tornado, that fabricator of outlandish scenarios, Preston Sturges. But this doesn't mean that Sir Alfred is spared those assaults of indignity which are Sturges' stock in trade: the film-maker's version of himself is no less subject to the processes of irony than anything else in his purview. And therein lies another difficulty of *Unfaithfully Yours*. When Pauline Kael (in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*) terms Sir Alfred 'a sensational parody of Sir Thomas Beecham' she simplifies. Surely Sturges uses Beecham as an agency of *self-parody*. And self-parody on this level of sophistication, demanding that we recognise both Beecham and his resemblances to Sturges, is something the world hadn't quite been prepared to look for in Hollywood movies.

3 The audience also missed the musical jokes

In the other movies about musicians from this period, one remains at a loss to decide whether their music is the cause or the effect of the peculiar way these people lead their lives. All the music we hear, from the 'Polonaise Héroïque' to the German Romantics and even to the prudently modernistic gratings of the 'Hollenius' concerto, seems to assert a province of emotion and gesture grander than any the likes of you or I will ever know outside the movies. And that's all



Harrison, Edgar Kennedy, Krueger, and concerned hotel staff.

the music is supposed to do (though that's quite enough). One certainly isn't invited to listen very hard. Stock responses are one's sole option.

Unfaithfully Yours, by contrast, is not only a movie about a musician but a movie about the effect of music, and if you don't really listen you don't really see. Pay close attention to those nervous quavers, those notorious ineluctable *crescendi* of Rossini; then to the sanctimonious yearnings of the Pilgrims' Chorus; finally to the undisguisable melodramatic excesses of not-quite-first-rate Tchaikovsky, and you'll find that Sir Alfred, already half mad with jealousy, *must* first become caught up in the mounting pleasures of revenge and then, in the full satisfaction of self-denial, *must* pardon everyone in sight, and at the last *must* trap himself into a round of Russian—very Russian—roulette.

But this is only the beginning, for much of the subtler irony of the movie also depends on the music. For example, there's the contrast between the way the energies of the Rossini animate Sir Alfred's fantasy of murder and the later subliminal operation of Rossinian motifs on Sir Alfred's temper when he finds himself unable even to get a box off a shelf. But at the very end of the film Sturges introduces the most delicious musical irony of all. Harrison, assuaged by Darnell's version of her alleged adultery (a remarkably unlikely tale, by the way: not all Sturges' ironies are musical), asks her forgiveness: 'Will you do me a very great favour?... Will you put on your lowest cut, most vulgarly ostentatious dress, with the largest, vulgarest jewels you possess [all this to Linda Darnell, that exemplar of 1940s vulgarity] ... and then accompany me to the vulgarest, most ostentatious and loudest, and hardest-to-get-into establishment this city affords?' He goes on to talk of drinking champagne and of painting the town various colours, then instructs his wife to put on her 'purple dress with the plumes at the hips', the movie's symbol of voluptuousness and the very dress Darnell wore to be murdered in during the fantasy. But through all this talk of vulgarity and lust a familiar tune begins to assert itself on the soundtrack. At first you can't quite believe that you are hearing—the Pilgrims' Chorus. But you are.

One might assume that, by means of this musical gloss on Sir Alfred's words, Sturges had effected his last ironic

contrast. But no: he presents us with an even more astonishing incongruity as Harrison utters into a blindingly luminous close-up of Darnell's face a line as fantastic as anything in those 'serious' pictures about musicians: 'A thousand poets dreamed a thousand years, and you were born ... my love.' And all the while the Wagner swells on in wordless praise of chastity and renunciation.

4 The comic business was too distant

So far, the impression must be that *Unfaithfully Yours* is generally more sophisticated, sometimes more subtle, frequently more special in its allusions, than Sturges' earlier films. But it is also—and often simultaneously—no less frankly primitive in much of its humour. Foreign accents, especially that of Sir Alfred's Russian-born manager (he sounds like Hurok, he's played by Lionel Stander, he's called Hugo Standoff), function much as they did for Mr Gallagher and Mr Sheen of vaudeville, though they lead to rather more elaborate defamations of standard English. Puns and other verbal derailments, the more *outré* (or corny) the better, are seldom resisted ('The way you handle Handel!' cries detective Edgar Kennedy to Sir Alfred, 'and your Delius—delirious!'). And the physical comedy is physical indeed. Vallee can't undo the zipper of his wallet without filling the soundtrack with a suspiciously flatulent roar. Opera glasses and other paraphernalia of polite concert-going squirt from the boxes of Carnegie Hall into the upsweeps and tiaras of dowagers below. When Sir Alfred accidentally sets a fire in his wastebasket, great hoses are carried in to pour lethally in every direction but the right one, while would-be fire fighters, amateur and professional, collide on all sides. Like Sir Alfred, Sturges indulges his passion for the 'vulgar', allowing that passion now to challenge and now to support the progress of a 'dialogue' comedy.

But all this is pure Sturges: I've mentioned nothing particularly to disconcert or to alienate Sturges' public. What is without antecedent in *Unfaithfully Yours* is the duration of the Rossini episode, almost completely without dialogue, in the second half of the film. Working with Harold Lloyd on *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock*, his last film before this one, Sturges was for the first time brought very close to the procedures of one of the classic mute comedians, and the degree to which he was affected by the experience appears even clearer in *Unfaithfully Yours* than in the Lloyd movie itself. Sturges must go the masters one better, and he proceeds to explore a single gag situation at greater length and more extravagantly than almost anyone before him. The second Rossini episode would have been daring in the 1920s; in 1948, when even Chaplin had largely given up extended slapstick

sequences (the scene with Martha Raye and the rowboat in *Monsieur Verdoux*, wonderful as it is, is briefer in the film than in one's memory of it), Sturges' demonstration of the unaccountability of the physical world must have seemed odd indeed.

Moreover, if Sturges was perhaps the most American of film-makers, *Unfaithfully Yours* is his least American film. Apart from Sir Alfred, all the characters are indeed Americans (or so we must suppose of Russian managers, Jewish tailors, Irish detectives and the like—the usual Sturges assortment) but the milieu is cosmopolitan New York, a good deal of the humour is of a Fifty-seventh Street cast, and the main action remains largely unmotivated by the particular stresses of American experience. And this is the first Sturges movie in which the American way of ambition plays virtually no part. The world of the rich and successful for once appears unthreatened by the climbers and parasites of *The Lady Eve* and *Palm Beach Story*; the world of the Little People—Frank Capra's world, as recast so brilliantly in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*—is for once unaltered by contact with fame and fortune.

Perhaps one atypical moment from the film will illustrate the Sturges quality generally missing from the rest. Lady de Carter, in a shop being fitted for still another Linda Darnell gown, is called to the telephone. She is told of the wastebasket fire that will cause Sir Alfred to be late for lunch. The details are confusing to her: did he 'set fire to it himself'? A saleswoman standing by, heretofore mute save for the words expected of those who serve the very rich, suddenly assumes all the received wisdom of the republic and pronounces (but with what depths of comprehension) a single word: 'Insurance'. For all Sturges' splendid games with Beecham, with Rossini and Wagner and Tchaikovsky, with the rediscovered possibilities of 1920s comedy and the timeless lure of daydreams, that woman's utterance does suggest something we might miss in the endlessly self-indulgent world of Sir Alfred de Carter.

But enough of the guessing games. Though I have toyed with a series of explanations of why so few were taken with one of the great Hollywood comedies, I conclude as I knew I would have to—I conclude that no explanation will ever demonstrate much more than the ingenuity of its creator. And I venture a further, sadder conclusion: the experience of the public's rejection of *Unfaithfully Yours* may have been enough to shake even Preston Sturges' faith in himself. For his only subsequent films—*The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend* (1949), with which he said farewell to Hollywood, and *The Notebooks of Major Thompson* (released in the US as *The French They Are a Funny Race*) from France in 1956—are far poorer works than anything that had gone before. After 1948, the old originality is barely in evidence; *Unfaithfully Yours* is the last convincing show of the self-confidence and audacity on which Sturges had constructed his dazzling myth of himself. ■



Linda Darnell and Rex Harrison.



Truthful or true to life? Left: Paul Hardwick as Brezhnev in Granada's 'Invasion'. Right: Oscar Quitak as Hugh Gaitskell in the BBC's 'Suez—1956'.

Truth Claims

Jerry Kuehl

Is there anything left to say about drama documentaries? It hardly seems possible, after so many years. The form, after all, came into being as soon as the cinema turned its attention away from observing life as it passed in front of the camera, or from presenting fantastic or fictional personages, to try to tell stories which were true. Turn of the century films of the Trial of Captain Dreyfus or the Mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin exhibited the characteristics of the form: they dealt with real events; they showed what cameras had not recorded at the time the events occurred, and they dramatised the episodes with which they dealt.

The form has flourished for generations—and each generation of film-makers seems to discover it anew. GPO and Crown Film Unit productions of the 1930s and 40s like *Night Mail*, *Target for Tonight* and *Western Approaches* were all, in their way, as much drama documentaries as are more recent celebrated examples like *Cathy Come Home*, *The Missiles of October* or *Invasion*. Yet there has always been an alternative strategy available to film-makers: to make films which could lay claim to being truthful without telling stories—which they could do by using commentary, images and direct statements by participants without employing actors. This technique, a natural development of the illustrated lectures of Victorian times, evolved into the traditional mainstream documentary style which is familiar to us today in the form of television series like *The World at War*, or single documentaries like *Jump Jet*.

So why does the dispute between these two forms persist? Much attention has been directed to the fact that although drama documentaries invite audiences to accept their portrayals as being truthful accounts of actions rather than simply lifelike, plausible, or true to life, they rely on dramatic devices and procedures

to persuade audiences. Critics have found this procedure illicit, since it obliges audiences to judge matters of truth and falsity by aesthetic criteria. Drama documentary enthusiasts are unimpressed by this argument. In their view, 'traditional' documentaries suffer from the same defects (if that is what they are) as do 'drama' documentaries: their producers select and manipulate participants; their camera operators film events and people deliberately and selectively; and their editors use all the tricks of their trade to dazzle and persuade their audiences. Believing that the two kinds of film-making are fundamentally the same, some drama documentary enthusiasts, critics and film-makers alike, regard traditional documentaries as crippled in three distinct ways.

The first is that, even in their own terms, they can never deliver what they promise. They claim to present the 'truth', yet they can never present anything other than one man or one woman's selective version of reality. Moreover, such selective versions are necessarily impoverished both visually and dramatically. Rupert Murdoch might allow a documentary film-maker to film him negotiating to refill his glass at a cocktail party; but hardly negotiating to buy a national newspaper. And to those who claim that access to such behaviour is precisely what is secured by film-makers like Frederick Wiseman and Roger Graef, the reply is that such film-makers deceive themselves. The real negotiations always take place when the cameras aren't present—as Roger Graef's film on decision-making at British Steel made clear by demonstrating that the decision on the Korf process had been taken before he ever began to shoot.

The second is that the methods of traditional documentary condemn its practitioners to present only the surface of people or events. By excluding



Granada's 'Gossip from the Forest', about the

re-enactments, reconstructions and invented dialogue, traditional documentaries abandon the possibility of ever penetrating beyond appearances to the three-dimensional reality. They thereby make genuine understanding of real persons and events impossible.

Finally, if traditional documentary film-makers are faithful to their own self-imposed limitations, they must accept that vast areas of human experience are closed to them. Moving pictures as we know them were not developed until the 1890s. Does this mean that no subjects from before that time may be treated? Only a few metres of film of Lenin survive: does that mean that his life must remain forever a barely opened book? Closer to our own time, no filmed record of Nazi extermination camps has survived (if indeed any was ever made). Does that mean that the Holocaust is forever off limits? To the rigorous, the answer must be 'yes'.

Drama documentary makers have always been quick to fill the vacuum left by their traditionally minded colleagues. This is not simply a question of opportunism. The drama documentary impulse is fuelled by two powerful ideas: the belief that its methods find particular favour with audiences, and the conviction that those same methods make it possible



1918 Armistice negotiations in the Forest of Compiègne.

for audiences to understand far more than they would by viewing films made by the traditionally minded. Both these ideas have stood unchallenged long enough to have become part of the received wisdom of television. Neither stands up to serious examination.

Audience response. In general, viewing figures for documentaries and factual programmes are lower than for drama, sport and light entertainment. But from this it does not follow that documentaries are inherently less popular than other forms of television entertainment. Their place in the schedule, the time at which they are transmitted, the amount of money spent on promoting them, the kind of publicity they receive, and the skill with which they are made, all affect the fortunes of documentary programmes. Though one episode of Thames Television's *Botanic Man* was the most popular programme in the London area the week it was transmitted, not even its most enthusiastic admirers believe it would have achieved such success had it been transmitted after the 10 pm news (as adult education programmes normally are) rather than in the early evening. *The World at War*, heavily promoted and transmitted at 9 pm, was consistently ranked in the JICTAR top twenty. The same contractor's *Palestine* and *The Troubles*, shown at 10.30 pm and

accompanied by more modest advertising campaigns, were seen by only two and three-quarter million viewers.

There is, in fact, no convincing evidence for the assumption that audiences always prefer dramatised presentations. *Holocaust* was immensely popular in the United States. In the absence of any network-produced documentaries on the subject, it is unrewarding to speculate on how popular they might have been, had they been made with similar resources, promoted on the same scale and benefited from the same position in the broadcast schedules. However, some comparison is possible for Britain. When transmitted in 1978, *Holocaust*'s much advertised episodes were viewed on average by 16.75 million people. The 'Genocide' episode of *The World at War*, which benefited from no special publicity, was seen by 15 million. West German experience was even more striking. Episodes of *Holocaust* were seen by between 32 and 41 per cent of the available audience. But the documentary programmes which accompanied them, and the studio phone-ins which followed them, were also viewed by up to 32 per cent of the potential West German audience.

Clearly, no one could conclude that audiences would welcome documentary and factual programming to the

exclusion of everything else. What does seem obvious is that skilfully made, adequately publicised and sympathetically scheduled documentaries can be as popular as dramatised accounts of the same subjects.

Understanding. The most persistent claim made on behalf of drama documentaries is that audiences who watch them achieve an understanding of persons and events which they would achieve less well, or not at all, by watching other kinds of programmes. The argument derives its force from the commonplace belief that most viewers prefer programmes made within the conventions of naturalistic drama; that they identify with dramatic *personae*, and that such identification can be used by producers to get across points which elude viewers of traditional documentaries. Dramatisations can do this—so the argument continues—because they exploit the skills of writers and directors, actors and actresses, to get beneath the surface of characters remote in time and place.

Holocaust illustrates this claim well. (Those who deny that *Holocaust* is a drama documentary should note that the choice of example does not affect the substance of the argument, which applies equally to such fastidious productions as *Invasion*, *Dummy*, and the BBC's biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer.) *Holocaust* was seen by many people who had not previously viewed documentary treatments of the same subject. Some said that watching the series gave them, for the first time, an understanding of the Holocaust. This understanding evidently came about because characters were played by actors and actresses familiar to the audience, because the dialogue was written in colloquial language and the story unfolded according to the conventions of ordinary television dramas. In other words, however horrific the substance of what was shown and told, the manner of the showing and telling made it possible for the audience to identify with persons from that remote, ghastly epoch.

An extreme form of this argument claims that drama is not simply a more comprehensive and satisfying way of exploring characters and events than is traditional documentary, but that it is the only proper way. This view is held by those who see the multi-dimensionality which is the hallmark of dramatic representation as indispensable to historical understanding. But before deciding whether to accept the argument, it is important to see just what is being claimed.

'Understanding' is an ambiguous concept, and it may be helpful to distinguish between two of its uses. First, 'understanding' in the sense of coming to know what someone did or what was done to him or her; and secondly, 'understanding' in the sense of coming to appreciate the motives and intentions of persons who acted or were acted upon. In the first case we are looking for a causal account of actions (x told y to do z) while in the second case we are looking for an account of intentions (x wanted y to do z). Much confusion arises when film-makers fail to distinguish clearly what is involved.

Sometimes drama documentaries claim to promote understanding in the causal sense. No film records exist of Hitler's last days in the Führerbunker, nor of the ordeal of the Czech delegation to Moscow after the Prague spring of 1968. Those chronicles must either go forever unshown, or be shown as *Hitler, The Last Ten Days* or *Invasion*. Sometimes drama documentaries undertake the equally difficult yet rewarding task of showing motive. What were the French and British delegates trying to do when they negotiated an armistice with the Germans in the Forest of Compiègne in 1918? Why was Fania Fenelon able to help some inmates of Auschwitz and not others? Why did John Foster Dulles refuse to support the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt in 1956? Since there is no film of the negotiations in the Compiègne railway carriage, nor of the Auschwitz women's orchestra, nor of the inside of John Foster Dulles' mind, part of the answer is *Gossip from the Forest*, *Playing for Time* and *Suez*.

Not that any given drama documentary sets out to provide only one kind of account. So when a drama marries an account of what happened to the Jews of Central Europe with an account of why middle-class Germans helped it to happen, viewers all over the Federal Republic are liable to ring their local television stations to exclaim 'Now I understand'.

The reality is that, far from being uniquely qualified to provide causal or intentional accounts of persons and events in the real world, dramas, and especially drama documentaries, are incapable of adequately doing either. What drama documentary regards as its special strengths are just those features which disqualify it from providing satisfactory accounts of either causes or motives. It is not too difficult to demonstrate why this is so. Once an episode has been recorded on film, there is no way in which a dramatic simulation can significantly add to our understanding of the original. Either the reconstruction mimics the original exactly, in which case the simulation is superfluous, or it departs from the original and thereby deforms what we know to be the case—in which event there can be no reasonable grounds for preferring the reconstruction. Episodes of which no filmed records exist are equally inaccessible to dramatic artists. The language used by performers may be 'authentic', because derived from court records or other stenographic reports; but the inflections, accent, volume and pace of what performers utter, as well as their gestures, expression and stance, will not be those of the persons they represent. It's hard to see how the bricks of uniquely insightful portraits can be made from the straw of performances known to be inauthentic before they even begin. This inauthenticity is inescapable. It is endemic in all dramatic representations, including those in which individuals 'play' themselves. For persons asked to play themselves are performers, just as much as are members of Actors' Equity. What destroys their credibility is not so much that the audience mistrusts their physical appearance, but

that it mistrusts their memory (did they really say that?) and their acting skills (did they really hold the knife like that?).

But do not traditional documentaries suffer from the same defects? General MacArthur steps ashore again from the landing craft so that the cameraman can film the fulfilment of his promise to return to the Philippines from two angles. Is that not a performance? Hardly, unless the meaning of the word is to be extended to encompass all forms of flamboyant behaviour. MacArthur on the beach at Leyte certainly behaved theatrically, but it would make no more sense to call him a performer than it would to so describe a marksman who demonstrates how to assemble a rifle for a training film, and who goes through the motions several times to allow for close-ups, cutaways, and different angles.

So far as providing causal accounts are concerned, makers of traditional documentaries have an unassailable advantage: they can ask real people questions, and record real answers. The real x can say, in reply to an enquiry, 'In 1975 I told y to do z.' There is no need for x to dress up in a six-year-old suit (which was of course new when the conversation in question took place) or in a new suit furnished by the wardrobe department (which wasn't yet made when the conversation took place) to speak words spoken on that occasion—or even to call upon an actor or actress to speak them on his or her behalf.

And what is true of causal accounts must be true of accounts of intention and motive as well. This is not only because of the difficulty of displaying the life of the mind in dialogue and gesture (though the difficulties of doing that are formidable enough). The defect common to all dramatic solutions to the problem of exhibiting intention is that the performer is obliged to pursue two incompatible goals: to be dramatically convincing in terms of the audience's expectations; yet provide a faithful account of the protagonist's motives and intentions. No performer can be known to have done both, unless the audience is familiar with the motives in advance—in which case any performance is superfluous.

If the subject of the film is not a real person (like the heroine of *Cathy Come Home*), the audience has no option. It must accept the account of events and motive offered by the film-maker. But it does so only by denying to the film any status other than that of fiction. Here again, audiences can only be expected to judge the truth or otherwise of a dramatic portrayal of what people did and why if they know independently the answers to the questions which the dramatic presentation itself purports to answer. So once again, dramatic portrayals can be seen to be either superfluous or false. Drama documentaries about persons whose native language is not English are particularly vulnerable in this respect. An American-speaking Himmler, an English-speaking Dubcek, or a Khrushchev speaking American with a Russian accent do not provide audiences with paths to understanding the motives of those difficult personalities. They can provide nothing but

doubly and trebly false trails, because they lead, not to the historical figures, but to the writers who wrote the lines, the actors who spoke them, and the directors who orchestrated their performances. So here, too, it should be evident that the best way to clarify intention is to ask questions of people who are in a position to give answers.

We are now, I think, in a position to judge the persuasiveness of the claim that drama documentaries lead to an 'understanding' of persons and events. When someone watches *Holocaust* and says 'I understand the how and why of the Holocaust'; *Suez* and says 'I understand the how and why of Eden and Suez', or *Gossip from the Forest* and says 'I understand the how and why of the 1918 armistice', that person is mistaken. He or she understands the argument of the films, but not their subjects. *Holocaust* may provoke a national debate which leads to the abolition of the Statute of Limitations on the prosecution of war criminals, but that does not mean that *Holocaust's* account either of the course of events or the motives of the participants commands attention as anything other than fiction.

Once again it may be asked whether this is not true of traditional documentaries. Are they not fictions as well, which tell us no more than what their makers want us to know, and thereby open themselves to those charges of special pleading which are at the root of all that I have said about drama documentaries? The answer is 'no': at the heart of documentaries lie truth claims, and these claims are based on arguments and evidence. Did Khrushchev ever lose his temper in public? Film of him banging his shoe on the desk at the UN may not convince everyone: film of Telly Savalas wearing the Order of Lenin and banging a desk on the set at Universal City will convince no one. Did Eden think Nasser was another Hitler? Lord Avon can speak on the subject with some claim on our attention; but Michael Gough utters with all the authority of a member of Equity.

Drama documentaries, of course, rely on argument and evidence, just as do traditional documentaries. Both *Genocide* and *Holocaust* have a common origin in the same historical reality—survivors' stories, documents, photographs, trial records—but the uses they make of the sources are as different as can be. Nothing stands between the traditional documentary and the truth claims which it makes. (Its claims may be justified, dubious or perfectly outrageous, but that is a different matter.) The drama documentary can make no legitimate truth claims, because whatever claims it makes are filtered through the artifices of actors' performances and writers' lines. And claims made through such channels are neither true nor false. They are fictions. So Ena Sharples, Basil Fawlty and Donald Duck are siblings under the skin to Marvin J. Chomsky's Dr Weiss, Michael Darlow's Anthony Eden and John MacKenzie's Jimmy Boyle. Their stories may make us laugh or weep, but they are unreliable guides to the world in which we live. ■

FILM REVIEWS

In Solidarity

Man of Iron/Gustaw Moszcz

Although neither knowledge of Polish affairs nor a viewing of Wajda's *Man of Marble* is essential for an appreciation of *Man of Iron* (Artificial Eye), this latest product by Wajda's Unit x is tied closely both to the earlier film and the current political issues. *Man of Iron* comes to Britain with a fair amount of prior publicity, largely due to the Golden Palm award at Cannes perhaps, but one also hopes that the massive coverage of Polish issues in the press has aroused sufficient interest to prevent the film being simply another East European offering talked about by many but seen by few.

It's not so much a political film (though inevitably because it deals with intensely absorbing contemporary events it will be seen that way) as a film about what it is like to live in opposition in a totalitarian society. What is immediately striking about *Man of Iron*, in comparison with many recent Polish films, is how it deals directly with the issues involved, and jettisons the ambiguously useful device of working through loaded metaphors—a route taken by many East European directors out of political necessity as much as aesthetic preference. Wajda has never suffered anxiety over the tricky business of how to present politics while making entertaining narrative cinema, and *Man of Iron* exists on the most superficial level as a technically polished, dramatically tense and moving moral tale. In another sense it offers the most succinct and compelling analysis of the background to the Polish upheaval.

In saying that, the film may be regarded as somewhat dry and abstract, but nothing could be further from the truth. Wajda and his team are in the fortunate position of having a ready-made scenario with more latent dramatic scope than the best Hollywood scriptwriter could dream up. *Man of Iron* is set in the short period leading up to and including the signing of the agreement between strikers and government in Gdansk last August. Skilfully edited into this time scheme are three lengthy flashbacks referring to events of 1968, 1970, and the mid-70s, each of which successively places more precisely the reasons why Solidarity emerged so strongly united last summer. The central characters are seen not as moral heroes struggling against the wicked state, but as fairly average individuals who gained in political consciousness with each setback.

The plot focuses on the efforts of the security police to embroil an alcoholic journalist, Winkiel, in a campaign to smear the public image of one of the leading activists in last summer's strike action. The journalist, superbly played by Marian Opiana, is himself the subject of blackmail exerted by the security services, as he has killed a pedestrian in a car accident. Winkiel begins the film as a snivelling time-server, sent to Gdansk



Tomczyk (Jerzy Radziwilowicz).

with instructions to fabricate or discover dirt against Maciej Tomczyk.

Tomczyk is the son of Birkut, central figure in *Man of Marble*. Both Birkut and Tomczyk are played by Jerzy Radziwilowicz, but in *Man of Iron* the son is the focus of attention, and his history since being discovered by the investigative journalist Agnieszka is gradually pieced together through the flashbacks which are revealed to both Winkiel and the audience. Winkiel's job of destroying Tomczyk is itself undermined as he begins to understand Tomczyk's life through his three major interviews with people closely associated with Tomczyk at different times. The first is with an old university friend, now a projectionist.

This first dip into the past is perhaps the most striking sequence in the film, since it contains black-and-white footage of actual events in 1970, showing how brutally the Gdansk rising was then repressed. This flashback also takes up the clash between father and son, Birkut and Tomczyk, over the student demonstrations of 1968, when workers refused to go to the assistance of students. In 1970 the helplessness is reversed, and we see Tomczyk and friends sitting uncomfortably in their student dorm as workers appeal to them for help from the street below. A female student, bleeding and bitter, bursts into the room and tells Tomczyk his father has been shot on the street. Tomczyk rushes to the spot, as the ominous sound of gunfire and factory sirens punctuates the dialogue. They find the spot where Birkut was shot, surrounded by police and troops. In the aftermath Tomczyk cannot restrain himself from smashing a chair over a TV showing a speech by Gierek (an action which in itself would have a Polish

audience in paroxysms of delight), and is incarcerated in an asylum. On release he goes to work in the Gdansk shipyard.

Winkiel moves by accident across the path of others who have watched Tomczyk's gradual move into worker agitation, and other flashbacks with Tomczyk's grandmother and wife (who turns out to be Agnieszka) reveal the genesis of Solidarity with equal economy and power. The moral reversal between *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* is not only that the first showed defeat for the search for truth whereas the latter is mutedly optimistic about the precarious and limited success so far gained, but centres on the differing functions that journalism plays in both films. In the earlier, Agnieszka had desperately searched to reveal the unsavoury truth concerning the fate of the Stakhanovite Birkut, who lapsed from favour. *Man of Marble* had been sliced by the censor, so that Birkut's death in 1970 in Gdansk was missing, being too politically dangerous to permit in 1977, when the film was made. This murder is clearly revealed in *Man of Iron*, where Winkiel's task is the exact inverse of Agnieszka's; Winkiel almost despite himself is set the task of distorting the truth, a task which he fails to perform not out of sudden enlightenment but, in character, out of his own moral vacillation.

Solidarity has announced that *Man of Iron* is also under pressure from the censor, with potentially 20 cuts being demanded for Polish release. The problem facing the censor is not what to cut, but what *not* to; almost every incident and scene poses a direct political threat to the established notions of political power. The version I saw on video in Poland was complete, and I noted only one significant cut in the version available for foreign distribution. This scene involved the removal by Tomczyk of the drowned body of a dissident who plays a small role in the film. Its removal is significant in that it helped to explain Tomczyk's readiness to adopt more radical action. Showing a dead dissident murdered by secret police (for which there is good evidence) may be bad publicity, but then the whole film destroys whatever credibility the secret police may have had.

Wajda has clearly relied on footage from *Workers '80*, a film made during the negotiations last summer, and uses material from that film to give context to the events of *Man of Iron*. Walesa makes several appearances as himself, but not only is he no actor, his view of the film leaves a sour taste. In early July, Walesa made a brief TV interview and described the film as 'too radical', 'too aggressive', and astonishingly enough declared it to be 'untrue', remarks all designed perhaps to reassure the government that his moderate influence seeks further blurring of the remaining differences between Solidarity and the authorities. Luckily Wajda doesn't need to play such circumspect political games, otherwise we would have been denied what must be his masterpiece. □



'Il Mistero di Oberwald': the Queen (Monica Vitti).

The Eagle Has Three Heads

Il Mistero di Oberwald/Gilbert Adair

As rarely, critical opinion on *Il Mistero di Oberwald* (Artificial Eye) has remained undivided since its frosty reception at the Venice Festival in 1980. By well-nigh universal consent, the film founders on three colossal mismatches: Antonioni/Cocteau, Antonioni/video and video/Cocteau, each of them edgily stalking the other two as in the vicious triangle of a Sergio Leone shootout. Nothing, in fact, could better serve as the heading for an unsympathetic review than the title of the Western I'm alluding to, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*: a good director (Antonioni), having encumbered himself with a bad play (*L'Aigle à deux têtes*), perversely undermines it still further with an ugly electronic process (video). Since this is intended to be a basically sympathetic review, and since the film would be unlikely to receive too much attention did not its director's past achievements justify interest in anything he does, I take the liberty of assuming as a given the first of these postulates. But what of the others?

L'Aigle à deux têtes was reputedly written at the request of Jean Marais, who craved a role that would give him the opportunity to 'remain silent in the first act, weep with joy in the second, and fall downstairs in the third.' What Cocteau, a professional to his elegantly tapering fingertips, came up with was—depending on how attuned one is to his feverish imaginative world—either a flamboyantly Hugolian melodrama or Sardou with a lisp. Inspired by the myths shrouding the deaths of Ludwig II of Bavaria and the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, he 'concocted' an apocryphal enigma of his own—in the library of her crag-perched hunting lodge, a widowed Queen is discovered with a dagger in her back while a young anarchist poet, the

image of the dead King, agonises at the foot of the staircase—then proceeded to write a play that would resolve it. If its plot is an insult to the intelligence, it is a deliberate, calculated insult; the paradox of it is that only by pulling all the stops out, by virtually courting disaster, can disaster be skirted. In a recent Chichester revival, Jill Bennett provoked incredulous giggles after her stabbing by fingering the small of her back as ineffectually as if her bra strap had got twisted.

The strength, as also the crippling weakness, of Antonioni's adaptation is that the intelligence which delivers him from that particular trap is the same that disqualifies him from seriously coming to terms with a work in which hyperbole is the common coin and anything less than the grand gesture constitutes a breach of etiquette. To be sure, both Monica Vitti and Franco Branciaroli (who bears a striking resemblance to the aforementioned Ludwig) look perfect, the latter renouncing Marais' Tyrolean lederhosen in favour of a revolutionary's worn corduroy (a visual pun here: *corps du roi*?)—a relatively minor detail, perhaps, but one symptomatic of Antonioni's taste and discretion. As is the fact that the screenplay has been shorn of a few of Cocteau's gold lamé excrescences: the dénouement, for example, treads a wary path between delirium and sweet reason by having Stanislas (renamed Sebastian for the film) simply shoot the Queen, then in his death throes stretch out his hand towards hers in a pose immortalised by another Michelangelo. But in the play's preface Cocteau defines his characters' psychology as 'heraldic', and the insignia of that heraldry are precisely the assassin's lederhosen, the Queen's insistently snapping fans, the candelabra à la Liberace. With com-

mendable restraint Antonioni selected passages from Brahms, Schoenberg and Richard Strauss as background music, yet the more obvious Liebestod, however hackneyed from overuse, would also have been more apt; he and Tonino Guerra considerably abridged the Queen's marathon 19-minute monologue, yet it's a speech that only becomes effective the moment one begins to steal glances at one's watch; and though the doomed lovers ought to be working up a storm fit to rival the thunder and lightning raging outside the window, Vitti is a strangely muted *monstre sacré* and Branciaroli a cypher (the role might have been—and, in other circumstances, probably would have been—written for Helmut Berger).

What is regrettable about such 'excess in moderation', as it were, is that Antonioni's visuals (shot with a video camera, then transferred on to 35mm film) are certainly a match for Cocteau's textual extravagance. Mine is a minority opinion, but I am convinced that his experiments with video and colour will make *Il Mistero di Oberwald* the *Becky Sharp* of cinema's long-promised and long-deferred electronic era. Since, at this primitive stage of its development, a video image cannot compete with the seamless fabric of light and shadow spun by a great cinematographer, Antonioni has chosen to accentuate, rather than attempt to mask, the medium's fragmented, honeycombed textures, so disturbing to the conditioned film buff. If *Il Mistero*'s literally dazzling landscapes, its baleful moon, the spectral chiaroscuro of its interiors (evoking, appropriately enough for such melodramatic silent film material, early essays in two-strip Technicolor) may be termed 'painterly', then it's in the strictly theoretical sense of being no longer the two-dimensional imprints of a glamorous three-dimensional studio set. Here 'beauty' (and there seems no reason why video should forfeit any of the charms of traditional cinema) is something that is adjusted on a control panel—so much so that only a photogram, not a set photographer's still, can give one the slightest clue to the film's 'look'. Such effects as the cold pastillised green with which the screen is suffused during a squabble between two mutually jealous courtiers and the clouds of mauve glory trailed by the scheming chief of police when he enters the Queen's library allow the cinema for the first time in its history to lay claim to 'lighting' as rich and expressive as in the theatre. And if these examples appear pedantic or simple-minded, it should be said that the colours are more often deployed abstractly, even musically—almost as a suite of *leitmotiven*.

It would be vain to pretend that the results are anything but imperfect. But in view of the immense potential that the film opens up (for Antonioni has clearly understood that, like sound, colour, CinemaScope and 70mm, video is not only a technical process but an aesthetics), its easy, not to say snide, dismissal by the critical establishment makes for disheartening reading. □

Through a Glass Doubly

The French Lieutenant's Woman/Richard Combs

A bustle of preparations while the screen is still dark. It might be nineteenth century background noise, except that it has a more contemporary, professional air. Then we see the heroine glancing in a mirror—a moment of self-contemplation or a last-minute make-up check?—before a clapperboard snaps shut, a voice (Karel Reisz's) calls for action, then a track, and Sarah Woodruff/Meryl Streep is pursued in just such a lyrical movement down the Cobb at Lyme Regis, shrouded in a great cloak and all the ironic, self-conscious romanticism of author John Fowles. It is a neat enough way of signalling that the film is no more going to be left in fictional peace by its makers than the novel. Even in these times of rampantly deconstructed narratives, it has a certain shock value, perhaps because of the ultra-conventional genre to which the film otherwise belongs. This might be the first deconstructed period blockbuster—unless one counts *Tom Jones*' into-camera monologues.

But in a way, the device mistakes Fowles' purpose, since his *French Lieutenant's Woman* is not primarily a self-conscious work in the fictional sense, but in the context of literary and social history. What he has done is to write himself back into the nineteenth century in order then to write himself and his characters out of it. He has mentioned Thackeray as his model for the kind of writer who mischievously leads the reader by the nose, and his interruptions, admonitions and self-advertisements really work in this mode rather than a modernist one. It is a mode which Fowles can then stretch a little to include the kind of information about Victorian society that would be interesting to modern readers. Its outcome, in the final chapter with its famous double ending, is the admission of greater possibility, in terms of both fictional and social freedom. But the 'God games' Fowles is fond of allowing his characters and himself as author aren't simply demonstrations of the writer writing (as the film's opening flourish is). They are too closely linked with ideas about liberation in other spheres, traceable back through *The Aristos* to *The Collector*.

The film's first problem is that there is not a nineteenth century tradition of movie-making to refer back to and then work its way out of. There is a twentieth century tradition of period recreation (most recently and disappointingly exemplified by *Tess*) which this film is anxious not to get lost in but can't really avoid, can only abbreviate and occasionally interrupt. But this merely intensifies the problem, since the issues Fowles wants to deal with are very much *in* period—or in the transition from one period to another. Necessarily deprived of the dimension of literary history, the film also fudges the social one, because of the way Reisz and screenwriter Harold

Pinter have chosen to follow up that first self-reflective gesture.

In 1867, while Sarah Woodruff keeps her lonely vigil on the Cobb, Charles Smithson (Jeremy Irons), gentleman, Darwinist and amateur palaeontologist, plights his troth to Ernestina (Lynsey Baxter). Before Charles, by dint of his intellectual interests neither in nor out of the period, can make his fateful acquaintance of Sarah, by dint of her shameful past ostracised from the period, they are in bed together. Or rather, a shot that begins with 'Charles' waking to answer the telephone continues to reveal that he is also an actor, Mike, and she an actress, Anna, on location apparently to make *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (United Artists). She rushes out in answer to the casting call, embarrassed that now the whole unit will know that they are having an affair.

Although we don't see any more of the making of the film-within-the-film-that-is-the-film, the two sets of characters are followed in tandem. Charles learns that Sarah became 'the French Lieutenant's woman' after having supposedly slept with that shipwrecked officer, and he later comes upon her while hunting for fossils in a wild part of Lyme known as the Undercliff. His infatuation with her eventually drives him to break his engagement and jeopardise his sanity. But Sarah disappears after their one night together, and Charles only finds her much later, now with some status and expression for her talents, unrepentant for having sought her own freedom. Mike meanwhile pursues Anna as filming comes to an end, and she leaves to be with her own Frenchman, Davide. She nervously meets Mike's wife at a party and envies her domestic stability (as Sarah had felt herself outlawed from ordinary kinds of happiness).

The first objection to this as a distancing device is that it alienates in the wrong way. The modern story becomes a self-

sufficient narrative in itself, a challenge not to suspend identification with the period melodrama but to make a double identification, with both pairs of characters. It is a bland and rather vague duplication, in which the ramifications of the Victorian story—the circumscription of women, the repression of instincts, etc.—are only carried forward in the glossiest love triangle terms. Towards the end, Pinter's writing of the modern instalment begins to edge towards the emotional tyrannies and frustrations of *Accident*, but this is not easily yoked with the emancipatory thrust of Fowles' ideas.

Charles and Mike are baffled in the end by the need of their women to follow their own drummer. But if there is a point to comparing the struggles of the two heroines in the two eras, it is not made here. Sarah, transported at the end of her story to the Lake District (and architecturally to a new age), achieves a kind of expression, through painting, which is presumably a bridge to the actress Anna. But what is never quite realised within the period story is that the melodrama itself is an expression of those dammed creative energies: self-dramatisation (neurosis) as the only form of self-expression. So much is hinted in the otherwise extraneous appearance of Leo McKern's specialist in the forms of melancholia (with a sheaf of illustrations of anguished faces much like the ones Sarah is seen sketching), and in one slow-motion shot of Sarah at the end of the Cobb, turning to look at Charles for the first time, her face an exaggerated mask of sorrow that perfectly fits her nickname, 'Tragedy'. But Karel Reisz's direction remains too strictly, not to say prissily, detached to incorporate such overstatement as a meaningful dimension. He sets up a series of rather brittle, receding frames around his subject—most noticeably, those constructed of mirrors and glass (as if Joseph Losey were being insinuated not only via Pinter). In substituting this distancing for Fowles' existentialism, however, he seems to be barking up the wrong literary tree. □



Sarah Woodruff (Meryl Streep) picks a way through the Undercliff.

FILM REVIEWS

My Homeland *Mephisto*/David Robinson

It is helpful to know the historical background of *Mephisto*, and then perhaps as helpful to forget it. Klaus Mann's novel *Mephisto* appeared in 1936 and was a *roman à clef* so transparent that it was more than forty years before it could be published in Germany, long after the death in 1963 of the original of its central character, Gustav Gründgens. Mann had known Gründgens at least as early as 1925, when Gründgens, then twenty-six, had produced the precocious seventeen-year-old's first play at the Hamburg Kammerspiele. Both young men acted in the production, with Mann's twenty-year-old sister, Erika, and Paula Wedekind, daughter of the dramatist. Two years later, after the same quartet had performed Klaus Mann's second play, Gründgens and Erika married.

In 1933, Thomas Mann and his family emigrated to Switzerland and thence to the United States. Gründgens stayed behind (he and Erika eventually divorced) to go from strength to strength as the favourite of the Nazi establishment, and certainly as one of the most gifted artists, both as director and actor, working in the theatre and cinema of the Third Reich. His character and career were, however, ambivalent. While living in the sun of official favour he always sought in his own work to avoid the more strident mannerisms of the official art; and at the same time he is known to have aided Jewish artists to escape persecution. His career continued practically without interruption after the war.

Klaus Mann took the title of *Mephisto* from Gründgens' greatest role, in Goethe's *Faust*. His novel is the story of an artist who for the sake of his career and acclaim readily sells soul and conscience to the service of the Nazis. István Szabó's script for *Mephisto* (Cinegate), written in collaboration with Peter Dobai, claims only to be 'based on' Mann's novel. Szabó clearly wants even less to be bound by the historical facts. 'We have positively tried to avoid all possibilities of concrete identification,' he has said. 'What interested us was not what happened to particular people, but what happened to a multitude of people, the link between a character of this kind and history.' For his purposes he has made his Hendrick Höfgen a much more flamboyant actor than Gründgens, even though they play the same stage roles. Moreover the script recognises that the hindsight of forty years has taught us much about the period and its dilemmas that Mann, even with his experience and bitterness, could not have seen.

Szabó uses Höfgen to explore, much deeper than any previous film-maker, the quandaries and responsibilities of an artist in a totalitarian state. To be sanctimonious in judging and condemning the German artists who stayed on is far too easy from our distance in time; and

Szabó does not make that mistake. Never, anywhere, have the opportunities and rewards come easily for artists working in the cinema and theatre; and it would have been as hard for a German artist of the 30s as for any other voluntarily to give up achieved success. When pressed to leave Germany with his wife, Höfgen echoes the feelings of Erich Engel and of many other equally uncorrupted artists who could not bring themselves to uproot. His language, he explains, is his whole livelihood. What would he do in another place? (Some time ago, in a programme note on Nazi cinema for the American Film Institute, I wrote that among all the film artists who left Germany because their race and political affiliations removed the possibility to work, I knew of none who had left without being forced, only out of moral principle and in protest against the régime. The AFI reproachfully told me that they had removed this passage, 'since very many artists left in protest'; but they never named one.)

Szabó's Höfgen is an unscrupulous charmer, user, opportunist. He abandons his mistress for his wife, uses his wife's family connections to get on in the theatre; and when his wife emigrates (to Paris) in 1933 he retrieves the indiscretion of his left-wing theatre past by playing up to the mistress of the Prime Minister and General (a character roughly based, it would appear, on Göring; and brilliantly characterised, with his shifts from bonhomie to crude violence, by the East German actor Rolf Hoppe). Capable only of playing roles, Höfgen self-consciously reproaches his own character as Machiavellian villain; but you feel his conscience is so coddled that he is admiringly accusing himself of no more than some clever social climbing. To every part demanded of him he quite happily adapts his mask. He divorces his wife; accepts the expulsion of his ethnically undesirable Negro mistress; revises his *Mephisto* performance to suit the prevailing ideology; gives earnest lectures on German culture; redefines Hamlet as a Hitlerian hero.

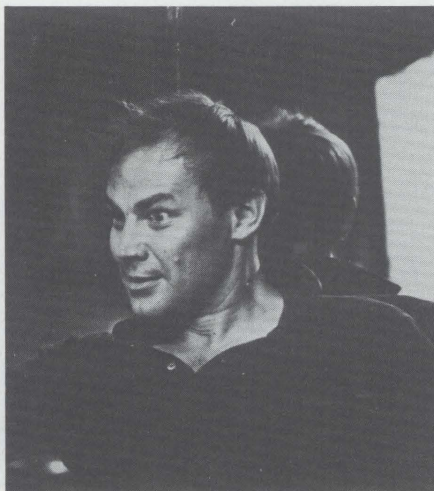
Höfgen's resource as well as his weakness is that he is an actor, with the actor's neurotic hunger to be loved and

admired by everyone. Incapable it seems of loving anyone himself, constantly forced by his nature to affect roles, he strives with pathetic diligence to please. The mask nevertheless occasionally falls to reveal despicable vulnerability. So important does Szabó regard these undefended moments that our very first view of Höfgen is at one of them: as a young actor he sits in his dressing-room scourging himself with an hysterical fury of jealousy and frustration while another performer, an operetta soubrette, queens it on the stage.

He is most exposed when friendship uncharacteristically gets the better of him: the flimsiness of his relationships with state power is exposed when he pleads for the safety of his oldest friend, a comrade from left-wing theatre days. His tragic enlightenment comes only when he leaves the reassuring adulation of Germany to go abroad, to encounter the scorn—intolerable to a creature who feeds on admiration—of former acquaintances. (The actor chosen to deliver the literal slap in the face is an English non-professional, type-cast as a *Times* critic, and demonstrating that it's a mistake to put up amateurs against professionals as good as Szabó's.)

Szabó's cast is multinational. Klaus Maria Brandauer—a highly skilful player who makes Höfgen at once slyly detestable and genuinely charming, slippery but pathetically transparent—comes from the Viennese theatre. His wife is played by Wajda's currently favourite actress Krystyna Janda. Rolf Hoppe is one of several German players. Two admirable Hungarian actors, György Cserhalmi and Peter Andorai, are colleagues from Höfgen's youth: one, a Nazi supporter, is disillusioned; the other stays loyal to his left-wing past. Both recantation and constancy prove fatal: the survivors are the chameleons and *Mephistos*.

In respects quite different from the intelligence and sensitivity of its human portrait and moral inquiry, the film is a model to other film-makers. It imposes itself by the dynamism of its narrative and its visual spectacle, all achieved on a budget that would not have paid for a single set-piece in *Heaven's Gate*. The secret lies not in some miraculous East European economy (as a West German-Hungarian co-production all but a few establishing shots were filmed in Budapest), but in a confidently planned scenario, the control of an increasingly assured director, pure technical excellence (the director of photography is Szabó's usual collaborator, Lajos Koltai) and above all rational use of resources. Practically everything is shot on location—theatres, museums, public buildings—skilfully selected and impressionistically transformed with banners and other properties. The rough edges and approximations (an American Express plaque glimpsed in a 1936 café; obviously post-war sanitary plumbing in a pre-war lavatory) are irrelevant and never impair Szabó's mesmeric evocation of a mood, a time and a place. □



Klaus Maria Brandauer.



Tim Culley (William Holden): *Dreaming of Old Hollywood?*

Hollywood Lullaby

S.O.B./Richard Combs

In Blake Edwards' artificiality lies the secret of his seriousness—and the difficulty of making out a serious case for it. His best films follow through an outrageous premise with a detached disregard for anything but the facetiously comic rules of the game. The end result might be described as an austere silliness: its brittleness brings out the vulnerability in romantic tosh (*Darling Lili*), and the pain, loneliness, alienation, what have you, in classic pratfalls (*The Party*). Austerity, however, implies no stylistic leanness. In common with Billy Wilder, another writer-producer-director who was once a rude jester at the court of Hollywood orthodoxy and now seems its beleaguered last romantic, Edwards has a love of detail, of the elaborate plot, and of characters with a gift of the gab. All of which conspires to give the impression of films keeping busy on the surface to hide the negative feelings beneath. Whistling in the dark is an activity whose sweet melancholy, or timid optimism, best describes the effect (it has served *Darling Lili* as a signature tune, and as a visual motif it is Edwards in a nutshell). That there is a serious game afoot might be inferred from the other Edwards: the non-comic subjects where the control and detachment he brings to comedy can become clinical, veering between the morbid (*Days of Wine and Roses*) and the uninvolved (*The Carey Treatment*).

S.O.B. (ITC), a Hollywood-on-Hollywood satire, belongs in theory with the comedies, seems occasionally inclined to become a non-comedy, and is permeated by an irritability, a sense of grievance, which violates the Edwardian rules of

control in that it is not incorporated in the film but is something it gives off. Hollywood producer and box-office golden boy Felix Farmer (Richard Mulligan) has made his first big-budget flop, a musical tear-jerker called *Night Wind*, and his suicidal delirium is only cured by an equally excessive inspiration: reshoot the film and give audiences what they want nowadays, a pornographic extravaganza. Trying to think of a suitable rewrite man, he asks *Night Wind*'s director, his friend Tim Culley (William Holden), who wrote *Last Tango*. Both men then pause to agree on how much they abominated that film (not, significantly one feels, given its full title). The moment somehow sticks out awkwardly: these old Hollywood hands, licking their wounds and blaming foreign decadence for spoiling the fantasies of yesteryear, seem briefly to have the undivided sympathy of the director of *S.O.B.* Elsewhere, Felix's fantasies are sufficiently put in their place by the silly titles ecstatically recited at his memorial service by a guru who quotes the gospel according to *Variety*.

The discordance, interestingly, chimes with Holden's remarks in another context, when he was commenting as producer Barry Detweiler in *Fedora* on the guys with beards who were taking over. Like Wilder again, Edwards has lasted long enough to find his sense of humour being overtaken by a professional indignation. And the results are rather similar. Where *Fedora* was so enamoured of plot that it told its own over twice, with variations, *S.O.B.* goes in for a different kind of doubling. Parallel to Felix's

doomed efforts to regain his legendary reputation are the last agonies of an unknown individual, who has a heart attack on the beach at the very beginning, is ignored thereafter by all and sundry (save his faithful shaggy hound) as he crawls through the sand, is washed out by the tide then washed back in again, and is finally discovered and revealed to be another forgotten old trouser. Along with the emphasis on plot goes a certain comic over-population. *S.O.B.* is a send-up of old Hollywood types that allows a galaxy of old Hollywood types garrulously, not to say sententiously, to make the most of their self-satirising cameos.

All of which could be taken as a sign that Edwards has become more himself—to the extent that his familiar brittleness now includes a hint of self-consciousness, even of self-defensiveness. If Wilder could identify with a has-been producer trying to set up some retrashing of *Anna Karenina*, it is not so unlikely that Edwards could see himself in Felix Farmer. (It is a curious reflection of their Old Hollywood mentality, though, that both producer-directors should give the creative weight to the first role, and that the actual director of *Night Wind* seems little more than a technician.) Crucial, of course, is the Holden connection. In Wilder's case, he goes back to *Sunset Boulevard* as a commonsensical foil for showbiz delusion, and for both directors he seems to represent what he did for Walker Percy's moviegoer, some touchstone of the decent and the sane, the profoundly ordinary. When *S.O.B.* is most inclined to be serious, it is through Holden, whose gift is to get away with lines like, "There are so few people in this town with a conscience."

S.O.B., in fact, is inclined to turn serious rather more often than one might expect—or than the film itself seems to realise. In this respect, it combines the Edwards of stops-out comedy and his clinical alter ego (the investigation of medical malpractice in *The Carey Treatment* looked so ineffective, perhaps, because Edwards really wanted to have a go at malpractice in the profession closest to his heart). Or rather, in trying for something cumulative—the temptation to see it as Edwards' summing up, à la *Fedora*, should probably be resisted—it allows the fissure between the two styles to become apparent from time to time. One feels the movie slackening, its comic responses becoming blunted, in everything to do with the machinations of Capitol Studios, where overplotting and overcrowding also become most evident. Studio executives (Robert Vaughn) and functionaries (Larry Hagman) proliferate, as the company first debates whether to recall *Night Wind* and recut it, and then accepts Felix's offer to buy the film from them so he can reshoot it. When Capitol then suspects that the porno *Night Wind* might be a success, they do a deal for the distribution rights behind his back. Trying to repurchase his film, Felix is shot by a policeman and dies with the thought, "This could mean

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another two million at the box office.'

What unavoidably signals this as a self-conscious enterprise is Julie Andrews, Edwards' wife and star, playing Felix's wife and star Sally Miles. Sally is the 'Peter Pan' of the movies, some of whose fans still don't believe she goes to the bathroom, as her agent puts it. In the opening credits sequence, she trips through a dance number from *Night Wind*, a toytown fantasy set to 'Pollywolly Doodle' which Felix later revamps as a sado-masochistic hellzapoppin'. Its new climax is a kind of Freudian recognition scene in which Sally, in a flowing red robe, is pursued by a demon lover inside a darkened cave of mirrors. Finally overcoming her fears, she rips away the front of her dress. The dance itself, carefully orchestrated between cod

eroticism and romantic misgiving, is pure Edwards. The grand revelation—the star beaming bemusedly down on the adornments which disprove her Peter Pan image as if they were improved models of headlamp—is, formally speaking, an impure moment, like the discussion of *Last Tango*. We never learn what it does for Sally Miles' image, but as a joke on *Mary Poppins* fans it is more embarrassing than shocking.

Such a discomforting effect should be distinguished from the discomfort which Edwards is adept at producing without referring beyond a scene. In this sense, *S.O.B.* is full of classic sequences which need to be carefully disentangled from the threads of self-pity and self-declaration. The climactic business of Felix's body being stolen by Culley and two

equally disenchanted peers (Robert Preston and Robert Webber), to spare him his hypocritical Hollywood send-off and give him a Viking going-away at sea, plays on excremental jokes past the point of bad taste to a kind of mathematical, or medical, refinement (the interest of Robert Preston's doctor is piqued). In the vein of true Edwardian slapstick, where pain is counterpoint to any pratfall, a nicer moment is perhaps the single shot of a plaster-encased gossip columnist being dropped to the floor, raising a shower of flakes. In the final shot, tying up the ends with an image that is as black or sentimental as one likes, the weebegone dog returns to the spot on the beach where his master so ignominiously expired, and witnesses the column of smoke that marks Felix's funeral. □

Dogged Existence

Memoirs of a Survivor/John Pym

The centre cannot hold. An unnamed English city; a group of once respectable blocks of flats; hoardings covered with the usual graffiti; a peculiar normality. A woman, in every respect anonymous, covers her distaste when, on cracking an egg, she reveals the foetus of a chick. But for the uncollected black rubbish bags, this might be wartime Britain. In the woman's flat, beneath a reassuring landscape painting lies an old dark blue Penguin. The woman's jumper, her capable, unfussy bearing, speak of time past. The English are, it seems, resolutely soldiering through a crisis, ignoring the gravity of their plight.

But as this adaptation of Doris Lessing's apocalyptic fantasy unfolds it soon becomes apparent that this is not strictly speaking a novelist's Britain, however fantastical, but a visionary's allegorical country. The director David Gladwell's first feature, *Requiem for a Village*, which was produced by the BFI in 1975, derived a measure of its astonishing power from the authority with which it dovetailed its demonstration of, say, the blacksmith's craft with the supernatural, the unremarkable way in which the dead, in their Sunday best, pushed up through the turf of a Suffolk churchyard. In *Memoirs of a Survivor* (Columbia-EMI-Warner), however, although the fantastic is treated as mundane—the woman (Julie Christie) passes without astonishment through the wall of her flat into fragments of two other worlds—the 'real' remains almost wilfully unreal. Matters are peculiar on both sides of the looking-glass.

Doris Lessing's somewhat benign view of our terminal society—shortages but not starvation, distant disturbances but not complete breakdown—is composed of intimations not details. The details she does give are often curiously naive, begging questions which would have been answered or more probably avoided by a more logical novelist. Her apparent purpose, and she has described the book as

'an attempt at autobiography', is to isolate the twofold cause of society's sickness: lovelessness (as symbolised by a Victorian couple's rejection of their small daughter) coupled with obdurate blindness (as symbolised by the woman's compulsive, futile tidying of a desolate 18th century mansion on the other side of the wall). The world of the flesh is in essence irrelevant, since the whole book, the journal of a surviving witness, is told as a journey of the mind to the point where the righteous and the innocent are about to be transported to some higher plane of existence.

Lessing's is no Tarkovskyan apocalypse: things do not themselves bear witness. However, transfer the actual details of Lessing's book to the screen, which is what Gladwell and his co-writer Kerry Crabbe have done (the 'real' narrative strand concerns the disintegration of an idealistic urban commune), and have them fastidiously, unmysteriously photographed by Walter Lassally, and the literary heart of the matter somehow gets lost. Emblematic snatches of dialogue (and snatches are really all one receives) no longer cushioned within a reported account of what occurred become impos-

sibly stilted. In such circumstances, irrelevancies do nevertheless intrude. We may be a sanguine race (a doubtful proposition), but surely by this stage mere anarchy would be loosed upon the world. Gladwell's urchin gangs are, however, out of *Oliver!* not *Lord of the Flies*. Why no disease? How—insistently—does the woman with no visible means of support live in such relative comfort?

Lessing's book is schematically constructed: as Emily, the Victorian girl behind the wall, grows up, her development is perversely mirrored by another Emily, the teenager (Leonie Mellinger) who has been unaccountably billeted on the woman. Both Emilys resist, one passively, the other actively, the demands of the 'old' and the 'new' societies; they reach a critical impasse, become one another and are seemingly redeemed. The symbol of their redemption is the transfiguration of an innocent, much-neglected pet, Hugo, a lugubrious dog with a cat's head, who becomes as Emily enters paradise a noble creature. Lacking an omnipresent narrative voice to explain these mysteries, to spell out, for example, the meaning of the narrator's two types of experience behind the wall, the film's emphasis inexorably changes. The dog to the end remains a lugubrious flat-faced dog. His transfiguration, which Gladwell omits, would have demanded a wholly different cinematic style.

To adapt a writer so deeply immured in her own increasingly personal visions as the Doris Lessing of recent years is a perilous undertaking. It requires, perhaps, an imaginative leap away from the books themselves. The woman attempts to hold together her corner of society, symbolised by a decaying, monstrously irrelevant 18th century mansion which nature is returning to its own, by resolutely tidying up. The image is a cinematic one (and Gladwell brings it off effectively) but not an essentially mystical one. One thinks, by way of rather random contrast, of Syberberg's Karl May dreaming with such passionate conviction of his perverse and equally personal paradise, and how this paradise was depicted only by back projected images and a few sticks of furniture. □



Julie Christie at the wall.

BOOK REVIEWS

Anderson's Ford

ABOUT JOHN FORD

by Lindsay Anderson

Plexus/£12.00 (£5.95 paper)

There are three things to be said immediately about this book. *One*: It is quite superbly produced, with stills (often from the frame) chosen and captioned with such loving care that they come as near as dammit to functioning as quotational recalls from the films themselves. *Two*: Lindsay Anderson has always written better than anyone else about Ford, with a comprehensive generosity that makes the films expand magnificently in the mind. *Three*: That generosity, like the neo-Fordian affections of *Every Day Except Christmas* which gradually mutated into the tetchy grumblings of *O Lucky Man!*, seems to have become a thing of the past.

With Captain Nathan Brittles of *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* leading his horse across the cover as he once did for *Sequence 11*, and with a text substantially prepared during the early 50s for a monograph that never appeared, *About John Ford* is, up to a point at least, like the proverbial fly in amber. Here, magnificently preserved, is Anderson's Ford: 'Close-ups, affectionate or noble, are held at leisure; long-shots are sustained long after their narrative role has been performed. A marginal figure is suddenly dwelt on, lovingly enlarged to fill the centre of the screen. Informed with heightened emotion, a single shot, unexpectedly interposed—a ragged line of men marching into nowhere, one of them playing a bugle-call on his harmonica—assumes a deeper significance than is given it by its function in the story. This is one of the properties of poetry. *They Were Expendable* is a heroic poem.'

One wants to quote here for the sheer pleasure of passages that capture the cumulative effect of a film as effortlessly as the following lines on *The Iron Horse*: 'A nation stretches and grows before our eyes, like those speeded-up films of vegetation uncurling, reaching out, pushing up irresistibly into maturity. And the epic theme is brought to life not by the platitudes of official record, nor by the over-emphatic gestures of melodrama, but by the ever-present sense that the whole massive design is built up out of countless unique, individual lives.'

Up to 1953 and *The Sun Shines Bright*, the last of Ford's great celebrations of traditional values —'the graceful nostalgia, the sense of old age and replete experience'—no quarrels with the book, only delight. Thereafter,

Anderson traces a process of decline, impatiently shrugging off the qualities (admittedly diminished) of *The Long Gray Line*, *The Horse Soldiers* and *Two Rode Together*, scornfully dismissing *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Seven Women*, salvaging only *Sergeant Rutledge* (in part) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (in toto). Considered along with his praise of *Liberty Valance*, his attack on *The Searchers* is illuminating.

Liberty Valance, lamenting the passing of the old West, is simultaneously a celebration in that the obliteration of Tom Doniphon (Wayne) by the politician who usurps his legend (Stewart) means the coming of the promised land so often spoken of in Ford films. But the whole thing, as Anderson admirably demonstrates, hinges on a paradox, in that where Ford's sympathies lie with the Wayne character, his judgment has to go with Stewart, with the inevitability of history, despite the knowledge 'that the future cannot be more simple than the past, and probably not much better, just different.'

A codicil to the legacy left by Anderson's Ford, *Liberty Valance* is welcomed not only with all the old understanding, but with a sympathy which acknowledges that the film's notorious rough edges are not necessarily a fault: 'Whether by design or by accident, this lack of visual refinement has an artistic result which is not just negative. The lines of the story emerge clearly, sparsely, with no decorative distraction.' Yet it never seems to occur to Anderson to wonder whether some such reasoning might not be profitable in approaching *Seven Women*.

The keynote to his assessment of *The Searchers*, on the other hand, is a refutation of its 'fashionable' elevation as Ford's supreme masterpiece. Acknowledging that it is 'an exceptionally handsome film,' 'moving always grandly through the deserts and towering outcrops of Monument Valley,' he explores interesting inconsistencies—most notably between Ethan Edwards' character as an outsider, almost a psychopath, and John Wayne's persona as the quintessential Ford hero—which go a long way to explaining for me my concurring feeling that *The Searchers* is an impressive work, the work of a great director, but it is not among John Ford's masterpieces.'

Yet in pinpointing the fact that 'in this story, from the start, we are far from the deep, idyllic family feeling that has been Ford's most consistent theme,' one has the uneasy feeling that Anderson is less concerned with pursuing the inconsistency, and seeing how it might ultimately lead by way of *Liberty Valance* to *Seven Women*, than with berating almost everyone who has written about Ford, from poor old Sadoul

down to Sarris, Wollen, Baxter and Place.

Most of his comments, especially on what he calls Film Studies criticism, are amply justified. It is the snapping tone that jars. 'The intellectuals have not yet forgiven Ford,' he notes apropos a book reviewer who sneered at McBride and Wilmington for liking *The Sun Shines Bright*. But aren't McBride and Wilmington intellectuals? Isn't, for that matter, Anderson?

'Pretentious' is another favourite adjective for critics and criticism. No doubt Anderson would call it pretentious to use a quotation from a comparatively obscure French playwright as an epigraph to a book on Ford. On the other hand, the quotation in French from Amiel's *Journal* which graces the title page of *About John Ford* is delightfully apposite. Only an inveterate grouch would object.

TOM MILNE

Mercer

COLLECTED TV PLAYS

Volumes 1 and 2

by David Mercer

John Calder/£6.95 each
volume (£3.95 paperback)

In August last year David Mercer died, leaving behind an impressive body of work for television, theatre and the cinema. His stage work may have enhanced his cultural respectability, but undoubtedly a larger part of his reputation must rest on his television plays, in their time startling and innovative. Many of them are reprinted in these two volumes, and sadly for some it's the only tangible proof of their existence, the original videotapes having been wiped long since. Through them it is possible to trace not only Mercer's growing stature as a (television) dramatist but also in microcosm a history of a particularly fertile period of British television drama, when taking risks was a *modus operandi*, elevated into an artistic principle.

The eloquent heightened naturalism of his first play *Where the Difference Begins* (1961), with its long theatrical set-pieces, comfortably fitted into the contemporary spectrum of TV drama, which, confined to the studio, was much possessed of theatre. But in *A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1962), a bizarre comedy with short tight scenes, featuring a writer with an obsession for gorrillas hovering on the verge of a breakdown (on which the movie *Morgan* was based), Mercer was already looking forward to a TV drama that enjoyed the fluidity and freedom of film. The film vs. videotape debate still rumbles on in TV drama circles, although latterly it appears to have been

resolved more in favour of film.

According to Mercer, the two strands in his imagination came together in *And Did Those Feet?* (1965), a full-blown fantastic epic about the bastard sons of an aristocrat, who were out of place and out of time. His 'naturalistic, anecdotal, politically oriented' side was wedded to a 'surrealist, free-wheeling, slightly happy-go-lucky, let's-see-what-we-can-do-chaps' attitude. Owing to the (union) restrictions on the use of film then in force, it was made partly on film and partly in the studio, and undoubtedly nowadays would be produced totally on film, if produced at all. Ken Loach directed *In Two Minds* (1967) in characteristic *televérité* style, and a play Mercer had not necessarily conceived as a film became a harrowing, almost documentary account of the experiences of a young schizophrenic girl. (It was later transformed for the cinema into *Family Life*.) In terms of style Mercer had returned to realism; hardly the poetic realism of his first play, but rather more rough edged, in keeping with the 'Wednesday Play's' reputation for confronting social issues head on.

The opposition of realism and non-naturalism is another hardy annual in debates about TV drama. Too easily it's assumed that non-naturalism (associated perhaps with a sort of theatricality) is a prerogative of the TV studio, whereas realism is perceived as a filmic virtue. Mercer's practice gives the lie. *The Parachute* (1968), completely shot on film, scorns realistic detail in a wide-ranging study of the Prussian aristocracy out of step with Hitler's jackbooted Nazis, which effortlessly mixes past, present and future.

In *Two Minds*, which helped popularise R. D. Laing's theories of mental illness (Mercer's own experiences also contributed), is for my taste one-dimensional. Perhaps it is less typically Mercer than Loach, although centrally connecting with a major theme present in the rest of his work, i.e. psychological/social alienation. It's worth noting that Don Taylor, who directed all Mercer's early plays, was already decrying (in the appendix reprinted here in Volume 1) the 'journalistic school of television drama' which he felt to be less complex than, say, Mercer's usual run of work.

Mercer was fortunate in having found a director who was prepared to subordinate himself to the needs of the writer; who was 'pro-words' in contrast to the then self-consciously experimental Langham Group, who were determined to liberate television drama from what they saw as its naive dependence on dialogue and to make the image supreme. Where Mercer led, Taylor was ready to follow, along some strange pathways.

By the television standards of

BOOK REVIEWS

the time, the content of those early plays was unusual to say the least. In *The Generations* trilogy—Mercer's first play plus *A Climate of Fear* and *Birth of a Private Man*—the subject matter was socialist politics and its relevance to the life of the individual, contrasting the idealism of 30s socialism with the complexities of a Welfare State Britain when CND was on the march. It is easy to take for granted the passion and commitment of the play-makers, but one can only wonder, in these days of institutional nervousness, at the courage of a TV management willing to back and transmit plays that were, dammit, political, and revolutionary in more ways than one.

If I have a criticism of these two volumes, it is that they reprint what was previously available. Of course it's valuable to have Don Taylor's passionately felt original essay on *The Generations* trilogy reprinted. But both volumes would surely have benefited from some revision, by the addition, for instance, of some further reflective piece by Taylor on Mercer's work taken as a whole. It's a pity, too, that the second volume neglects to give original production details, but these are minor quibbles set against the continued availability of some remarkable work.

PAUL MADDEN

Vietnam

HOLLYWOOD'S VIETNAM

by Gilbert Adair

Proteus/£7.95

The Civil War threw up the notion of the Great American Novel. Eighty years later the Harvard undergraduate Norman Mailer, in conscious pursuit of this national literary chimera, pondered which theatre of war offered the richest fictional possibilities, and chose the Pacific in order to avoid confronting Papa Hemingway on his own battlefield. Another twenty years on and Mailer's successors, under his influence, were deciding which graduate school to choose to avoid the draft. Though some fairly creditable fiction was to emerge from the Vietnam war, most notably Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers* and Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*, no one was expecting any major literature out of this confused conflict, and newspaper editorials were not asking, as they did early in World War II, when the war poets would start producing. What people were asking, in a cultural climate that had seen the film replace the novel as the

fashionable medium, was—what is Hollywood doing about it?

The answer was, in the title of Julian Smith's 1975 book, *Looking Away*. Equally nervous about offending doves and hawks, the insecure New Hollywood made allegorical Westerns and movies about World War II. It's interesting to note that when America became involved in Vietnam under Kennedy, Smith was teaching literature, and that when the war ended he was a professor of film. His brilliant study, highly personal and deeply partisan, was about 'thirty years of war films in which Hollywood, by affirming certain values and reinforcing certain fears, helped create the state of mind that led to Vietnam.'

During World War II, Hollywood invented a new genre, the war movie, as part of its contribution to the national effort, and forged close links with the Department of Defense, who over the years provided responsive clients with assistance of incalculable value. Korea coincided with a new cycle of World War II films and itself initiated a twenty-year cycle of cold war combat pictures from Fuller's *Steel Helmet* (1950) to Altman's *M*A*S*H* (1970) that, Smith demonstrates, was more significant than most historians have recognised. Smith is very much concerned with the symbiotic relationship between American public life and the movies and he rediscovered a striking film called *Prisoner of War*. In this 1954 B-movie, an American intelligence officer infiltrates a North Korean POW camp to report on interrogation methods after receiving a three-day crash course in Marxism. He's played by that veteran of World War II pictures, Ronald Reagan.

Completing his book in 1974, Smith had only a single major Vietnam combat picture—John Wayne's *The Green Berets*—to work on, together with the brief wave of callow campus protest pictures and the concurrent, and continuing, stream of returning veteran movies. So he looked forward to a day when films about Vietnam would pick up Oscars (in 1979 two superficially similar ones, *Coming Home* and *The Deer Hunter*, swept the board) and Hollywood would do its duty and provide the national psyche with the films it needs. 'This cannot be done in one film, probably not in a dozen, maybe not in a hundred,' he writes. 'But it must be done. Hollywood, the saying goes, is our dream factory—and we need the dreams it can give us, for if we don't dream about what is troubling us, we may go mad.'

Gilbert Adair never refers to Smith's book (or indeed to any other) in *Hollywood's Vietnam*, but *Looking Away* is clearly, and rightly, his point of departure, and rather more than half his space is given up to pictures produced during the past half-dozen years. Adair's recent writings in

SIGHT AND SOUND, *Film Comment* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin* made his first book something to look forward to. There are sharp comments here of a kind one might expect. 'Revolution was in the air, precisely where Paul Williams' *The Revolutionary* (1970) was determined to keep it'; *Coming Home* is 'a frisbee of a movie, held aloft by its own weightlessness'. There are astute and often provocative analyses of individual pictures. But *Hollywood's Vietnam* seems hastily written and is poorly edited, and Adair has unwisely limited himself to films that deal explicitly with the war. Such key films as *Straw Dogs*, *The Dirty Dozen* and *The Wind and the Lion* are thus ignored.

Equally importantly, writing six years after Smith, Adair hasn't attained the historical perspective that might bring the war into focus. He still speaks of *Apocalypse Now* capturing 'the unprecedented obscenity of the Vietnam war' and concludes his defence of the helicopter assault sequence in that movie with the comment: 'What kind of spectator finds himself exulting in the devastation of a defenceless village...? The unrepentant hawk, perhaps. But for anyone politically sympathetic to the Vietnamese cause to feel such uncomplicated exhilaration, he would have to be totally insensitive to the ideological signals that the movie is clearly emitting...'

From this passage one infers that only hawks need repent and that there was a single 'Vietnamese cause', i.e. that of the Communist insurgents. This suggests at the least a certain insensitivity to the events of the past seven years, and is compounded by the book's final sentence, suggesting that the ultimate cinematic truth will only be found in a movie 'made by the Vietnamese themselves'. Does Adair seriously believe that the studios of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are likely to produce a film on the war that will command international attention?

History may perhaps show that the best movies to come out of the Indo-China conflict are Pierre Schoendorfer's *317ème Section* (his 1965 feature, shot in Cambodia, about a doomed French patrol at the time of Dien Bien Phu) and his *Anderson Patrol* (a documentary made a couple of years later about an American infantry unit led by a black officer). They confine themselves to the day-to-day experience of professional soldiers in war and neither is mentioned by Smith or Adair.

A major book remains to be written about the effect of the war on American art and popular culture, but no movie or cluster of movies will elucidate the Vietnam experience. It is far too complex, possibly incapable of being fully understood by anyone.

PHILIP FRENCH

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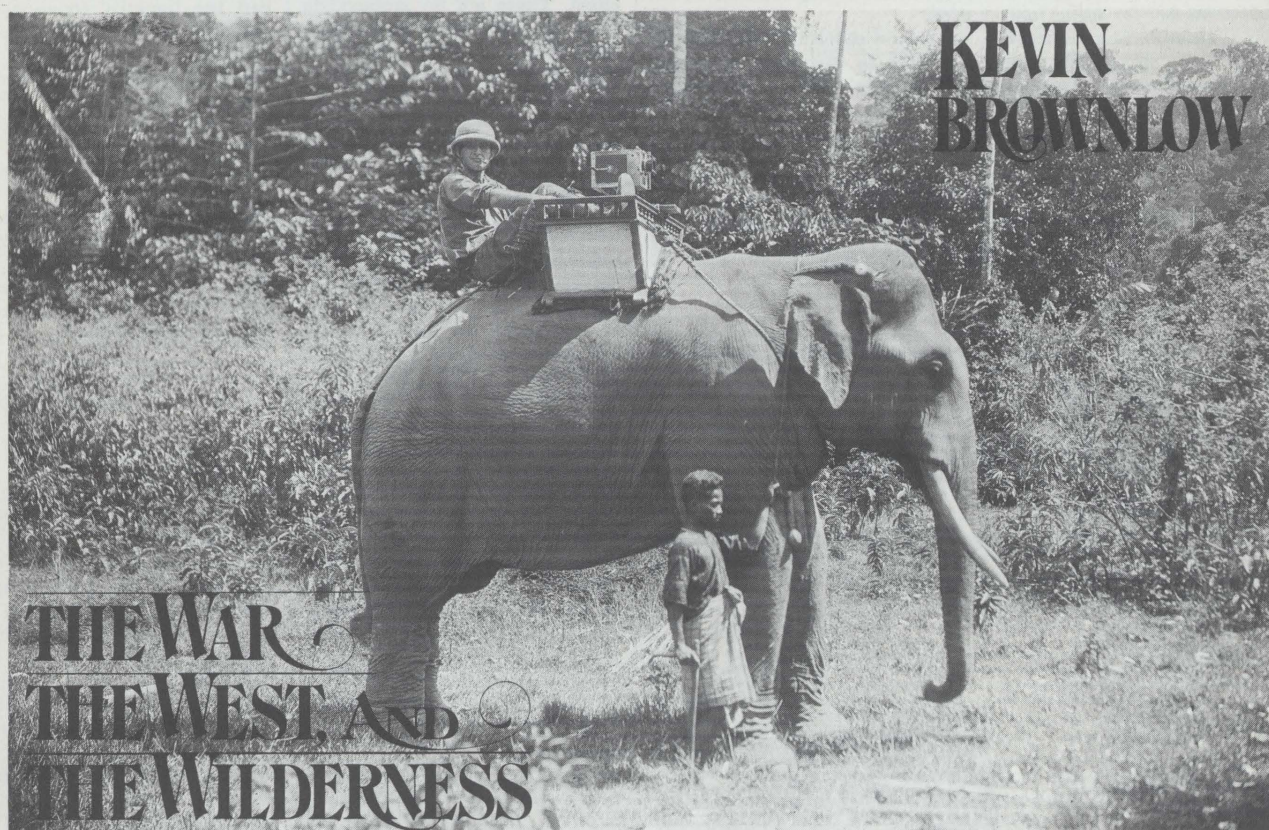
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ALEXANDER WALKER, *Evening Standard*

Ernest B. Schoedsack and camera platform for *Chang* (1927)



This book is a treasure hunt through archives and private film collections in search of history on film – the history of World War One, the old West and the great Expeditions. It contains interviews with such pioneers as Merian C Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack – to whom the book is dedicated – and Dorothy Arzner, Karl Brown, Douglas Burden, Yakima Canutt, Lillian Gish, Allan Dwan, Henry King, Rowland V Lee, Tim McCoy, Lewis Milestone, Capt John Noel, George Stevens, Lowell Thomas, King Vidor and John Wayne. Among the 350 rare and beautifully reproduced pictures are many from their private collections.

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LETTERS

Triumph of the Will

SIR,—To the ardent researchers into the 'Riefenstahl Industry', may I add a footnote? They might well extend their digging into the part played by Walther Ruttmann in the making of *Triumph of the Will*, especially the editing. (He was reported killed on the Eastern Front.) From his earlier work—*Berlin: Symphony of a City* (1927), which was inspired by Carl Mayer who later dissociated himself from the film on the grounds of its inhumanity, and *Accaio* (*Steel*, made in Italy in 1933)—he was a clever technical editor. Grierson summed up *Berlin* best by writing that it succeeded only in 'creating a shower of rain'. Ruttmann was interested mainly in surface rhythms and visual movement.

While making my *Hitler* film in 1960–61, I talked with several of the veteran newsreel cameramen who were part of the team who shot *Triumph*. Their memories were sharp but I shall not repeat them now. They did not admire Leni. She was a shrewd businesswoman. When Leiser's Swedish-made film *Mein Kampf* was released in West Germany in 1961, she sued both him and the Swedish company for using footage from *Triumph*. She produced documents to prove that the money paid by the German

government for her to make the film was placed into her personal bank account and the film was therefore her copyright. She won the case.

This took place while my *Hitler* film was being made. I informed my producer at Real Film, Walther Koppel, that I too was using footage from Riefenstahl's films. She might sue him. Koppel gave me his memorable smile. 'She would not dare!' he said. She didn't.

She was, and maybe still is, an alluring showman. Her private unveiling of *Olympiad* to the Berlin press, as told me by that much respected film critic, Willi Haass, was hilarious, too good to be revealed here.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL ROTH
Wallingford.

SIR,—It did not take nearly fifty years for the imperfections of *Triumph des Willens* to be uncovered, nor are the details given in Brian Winston's article and Jonathan Sanders' letter exhaustive. This may be due, as in the case of other subjects, to the significant drawback that seemingly only American and English secondary literature was used.

I should especially like to draw attention to two ideas in earlier publications. In a newspaper

article the critic and historian Frieda Grafe considered it 'speculation to claim that the film could have worked only for the Nazis. It is equally conceivable that those who watched these pictures with open eyes suddenly grasped the true nature of what they were facing.' (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13/14 September 1975). For the critic Wilhelm Roth, the sequence of parades at the end of the film dwells on marching to the point of intolerability, reduces it to its barest essentials. (*Filmkritik*, July 1972). Two views which should enable us to consider the propaganda question more discriminatingly. If propaganda is seen as falsification, this latter can only be found in *Triumph des Willens* if the harmonisation of social antagonism is discovered. A Nazi, on the other hand, would have to assign it to the former category, as he would see the film only as self-glorification.

As I consider a film to be the answer of the film-maker to social conditions, I cannot except here a categorisation as propaganda film. It is methodically confusing to label a film 'propaganda' without indicating whether we are referring to the intention or the effect. There are no propaganda films as such, only propaganda intentions and effects, which this medium is able to aim at or cause. The extent to which this applies to *Triumph des Willens* can be seen in my book *Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph des Willens* (Dortmund, 1981).

Concerning the way the film was produced, the imperfections referred to by Winston and the assessment of artists during the fascist period, a number of comments might be made. An on the whole insignificant example should however show that even a good grounding in the source material does not answer all questions. Winston sees in the 'seven patterns of light on the backgrounds of the twelve speakers' a possible indication that some speeches were filmed afterwards in the studio. He has to admit that there is no evidence for this in the picture. A possible explanation for the changed background is found in the allusion in the *Völkischer Beobachter* to the fact that each speaker could by means of a button signal to the lighting engineer to switch off the floodlights. Besides, the extracts used in the film were recorded on different days: this information is supplied by the reports on the party conference in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, where the long speeches are printed in full.

Regarding the question of whether individual scenes were re-recorded in the studio, however, scrupulously exact treatment of sources is of no account. What is relevant is the other realisation, which can be found in many places, that we are dealing in Riefenstahl's film with a totally artificial representation of the

party conference—although historians, of all people, naively spot the film as historical evidence—and that Riefenstahl herself (but also Speer and the others) are not reliable witnesses of contemporary history.

Finally I should like to quote from my book: 'The discussion surrounding Leni Riefenstahl and her work will continue with all its ideological and methodological confusions, either because the basic principles developed in this text do not suffice to analyse a legend, which is what she herself and her *Triumph des Willens* have apparently developed into, or because the partners to the discussion are lacking in perception.'

Yours faithfully,
PETER NOWOTNY
Universität Osnabrück.

This Loving Darkness

SIR,—The title of C. B. Morris' book *This Loving Darkness*, puzzled over by Gilbert Adair (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1981), is actually a quote from C. Day Lewis' poem *Newsreel* (1938). Not a very good poem, it's a somewhat patronising warning to those who had the temerity to escape the realities of that time in the cinema:

'Enter the dream-house, brothers
and sisters, leaving
Your debts asleep, your history at
the door:
This is the home for heroes, and
this loving
Darkness a fur you can afford.'

The poem concludes with a vision of the war to come, and Day Lewis' poor escapists stumbling out of the 'dream-house' into the world of bombs and guns.

Yours faithfully,
PETER LINNETT
Beckenham, Kent.

Camera

SIR,—Elizabeth Sussex may like to know (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1981) that a complete programme was devoted to the work of Graham Head on BBC South in July to try to redress the fact that he 'got very little reward for years and years of keeping nitrate films under his bed.' We showed the films; and the bed. Incidentally, how could *SIGHT AND SOUND*, of all people, manage to print the world's most famous Lumière scene of a train coming into a station the *wrong way round*?

Yours faithfully,
JOHN HUNTLEY
BBC Southampton.

SIR,—I read Elizabeth Sussex' article on Granada Television's *Camera* series with great interest—hardly surprising, as I was one of the three directors on the series. It is as one such, and only one, that I am writing now. I do not want to quarrel with what was in the article, but rather, what

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was not: namely, a true appreciation of where the credit, and of course the responsibility, lay.

It is a common fault of television reviewers to heap acclaim or accusation on the wrong head; but they write in haste, and all too frequently in ignorance. Elizabeth Sussex did neither, but she did, I feel, fall into the same trap. The truth is that the whole *Camera* project, examining the origins and successive development of documentary on film, from frozen image to the present day, was conceived by Maxine Baker, the producer, as far back as 1976 when she was working at the NFA. For the *Camera* series at present in question, Maxine Baker chose the subjects, the directors and the film researchers. If I might use an analogy (and here I speak only for myself): if the series were a group of seven different, but complementary, buildings, then Maxine Baker was the architect and consultant, the researchers selected the materials, the directors did the building and made the inevitable compromises, and Gus Macdonald performed the opening ceremony.

My serious contention is that Elizabeth Sussex almost ignored the architect, only one mention in the whole article. I believe Mrs Sussex talked to Maxine Baker, amongst the rest of us, but chose to quote only the directors. Her prerogative, surely; but just as surely, a misrepresentation. In

fact, this was a series in which to single out any one contribution would be invidious. Personally, I knew next to nothing about the subject when approached by Maxine Baker; I learnt as much as I could where I could, principally from Orly Ofrat, the film researcher on the two programmes I directed; and I turned to Maxine Baker, who alone could advise me on my contribution to the series as a whole. This was not the impression I received from Elizabeth Sussex' article.

Yours faithfully,
MARK ANDERSON
Granada Television.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CARLOS CLARENS, freelance writer now living in New York, is a film critic on the *Soho Weekly News* ... MUNDY ELLIS is the BFI Press Officer and will also edit *BFI News* ... JERRY KUEHL worked on the *World at War* and other documentary series for Thames Television, and is now Head of General Studies at the National Film School ... E. RUBINSTEIN teaches at the College of Staten Island, the City University of New York, and has written a monograph about Preston Sturges ... ALEXANDER SESONKE is Professor of Film Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara and author of a book on Renoir.

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ON NOW

●CITY OF WOMEN

(Artificial Eye)

Snáporaz (Marcello Mastroianni), latter-day Dante and visionary, falls asleep on a train and dreams of following a woman into a forest. Thence he is buffeted by a series of erotic encounters as he wanders through a world of predatory women who alternately harangue him and make advances. Having visited a feminist congress, a museum of erotica, a fairground and a gladiatorial display, he seeks refuge in a balloon, but is woken with a bump when a large-breasted Lolita on roller skates shoots him down. The film dredges its material from autobiography and male fantasy, exchanging plot and narrative for the inconsequential associations of dreams in a string of brilliant circus numbers which, as the now wakeful Snáporaz tries to snuggle back into his vision of fair women, Fellini exploits to establish a link between infantilism and the outsize female images that people the cinema: his apology but also his justification. (Bernice Stegers, Anna Prucnal.)

●THE CONSTANT FACTOR

(Cinegate)

Although it maintains the polemical stance of Zanussi's more recent films, *The Constant Factor* has less of their forced, dry didacticism and a more supple film flair as well. It is both a sharp analysis of the apparently endlessly corrupt machinations of the Polish political and social scene, with bribery and more subtle forms of blackmail uppermost, and a character study of its young idealistic hero (Tadeusz Bradecki). After progressing from mountain climber to company official—with the greedily received perks of foreign travel—he refuses to collaborate fully with the system, is framed and demoted to window cleaner. Zanussi tells this doleful tale with a good deal of justified camera bravura—the army training scenes, the mountain forays, a brisk cutting style for encounters in offices and factories—and fills in backgrounds and characters with an icy precision. Certainly one of the most outspoken films yet to emerge from Eastern Europe. (Zofia Mrozowska.)

●GOODBYE PORK PIE

(Brent Walker)

A triumphant box-office success on its home ground, Geoff Murphy's film is the most confident yet to emerge from the hitherto sporadic New Zealand cinema. What makes it so attractive is partly its modesty. Murphy takes a formula road movie situation—two drop-outs, one young, one still pretending to

be, embark on a cross-country spree in a stolen car—but never weighs it down with either mock-philosophising or too much local colour. Instead, with no small help from his cutter, Mike Horton, he succeeds in whipping the picaresque action along with an unpredictable rhythmic skill, notably in a zippily orchestrated car chase around the streets, shopping arcades and railway platforms of Wellington. The film falters a bit in its later stages, but recovers at the end, with the gathering apocalyptic overtones nicely undercut by a throwaway ending. Particularly in the light of recent disappointments from Australia, this brings a welcome breath of Antipodean fresh air into the cinema. (Tony Barry, Kelly Johnson, Claire Oberman.)

●HISTORY OF THE WORLD PART I

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Mel Brooks prattles through some arbitrary 'Great Moments' with the instinct for self-preservation of a veteran night club entertainer. Made on a grand and garish scale, and peppered with cheerful scatological talk (all we see, however, is cardboard hokum), this History has a pleasingly fresh way with topics as hackneyed as the Stone Age and the French Revolution. Mme Defarge (haglike Cloris Leachman) absently flicks the wart on her chin and a bell chimes. Brooks (who plays most of the plum roles, including Torquemada, MC of an extravagant musical auto-da-fé) strikes the Sidney Carton pose only to be rescued from the scaffold by a jiving black entertainer—who has last been seen in the Roman Empire sequence where he sparred with our hero in the Main Room at Caesar's Palace. Proof that scatter-shot jokes rather than sustained parodies remain Brooks' singular forte. (Madeline Kahn, Dom DeLuise, Gregory Hines.)

AMERICAN POP

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Animated history of America's popular music, depicted through the generations of a Russian immigrant family and in the typically bald, garish style of Ralph Bakshi, who races through ragtime and Gershwin to linger in his favourite territory of Beat culture, drugs and urban aggression. Grotesquely fascinating in parts, deeply irritating as a whole.

AND QUIET ROLLS THE DAWN

(Cinegate)

A struggling Calcutta family disintegrates in shame and selfishness when their sole breadwinner (the elder daughter) stays out all night. Unfortunately it doesn't quite add up to the political critique director Mrinal Sen intends. (Satya Banerjee, Gita Sen.)

CITIZENS BAND

(Contemporary)

Jonathan Demme's likeable 1977 predecessor to *Melvin and Howard*, taken off the shelf now that its subject has acquired some British topicality. It doesn't have the narrative facility of the later movie, but Demme brings off some unforced social comedy in much the same good-humoured idiom. (Paul Le Mat, Candy Clark.)

ENDLESS LOVE

(Barber International)

Endless, anyway: Franco Zeffirelli and his scriptwriter have drained off so much circumstantial evidence from Scott Spencer's novel of devouring teenage passions that there are almost no characters worth taking seriously.

The photography's romantic hues and the pretty looks of Brooke Shields and Martin Hewitt are insufficient compensation. (Shirley Knight.)

ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

(Barber International)

In 1997, Manhattan Island has been turned into a maximum security prison to accommodate a 400 per cent rise in the crime rate. But John Carpenter never elaborates on this version of the future, settling for a rather aimless collection of set-pieces. (Kurt Russell, Lee Van Cleef, Ernest Borgnine.)

ESCAPE TO VICTORY

(ITC)

John Huston at his ricketiest in a ludicrous yarn—pow football team plays the German international side and escapes en masse—which awkwardly mixes new liberal sentiments with old dramatic ploys. Some distinguished footballers look on uneasily. (Michael Caine, Sylvester Stallone.)

THE FOUR SEASONS

(CIC)

Definitely a film by Alan Alda: he writes, directs and tenaciously holds the centre stage in a coterie of married couples, whose relationships ebb and flow as the seasons change. Acute observations and spry comedy jostle with fuzzy histrionics. (Carol Burnett, Sandy Dennis, Jack Weston.)

GERMANY, PALE MOTHER

(Mainline)

Another West German attempt (written and directed in 1979 by Helma Sanders-Brahms) to come to terms with the still immediate past. This inappropriately lavish feminist saga of a family's disintegration plods melodramatically, and reveals little evidence that, 34 years after the war, there is any comfort in historical perspective. (Eva Mattes.)

THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER

(ITC)

A combined musical, thriller and variety show, featuring the soft-toy frogs, pigs, bears and various unmentionables from the (ATV) series. Too stuffed with unwanted human cameos and unfunny business to be a total success, but large chunks are pleasingly daft. (Diana Rigg, Charles Grodin; director, Jim Henson.)

HONEYSUCKLE ROSE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Richly earthy performances from Dyan Cannon and Willie Nelson lend unusual warmth to the marital problems of a country-and-western star whose wife is left behind when he goes on the road. Nudging direction from Jerry Schatzberg tends to undo their good work. (Slim Pickens, Amy Irving.)

HONKY TONK FREEWAY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Never were epic ambitions more belied by catch-as-catch-can exploitation. John Schlesinger relentlessly grabs for the cheapest laughs in this vision of America's freeway culture which never ties together its plot, characters or pile-ups (let alone its vision). (William Devane, Beau Bridges, Hume Cronyn.)

IN FOR TREATMENT

(Essential)

The Dutch theatre group, Het Werkteater, undertakes one of the most hazard-strewn of subjects: the relationship between two men dying of cancer in hospital. Scrupulous naturalism keeps it all under control, despite the inevitable contrivance. (Helmert Woudenberg, Frank Grothof; directors, Erik van Zuylen, Marja Kok.)

IN GOD WE TRUST

(CIC)

Marty Feldman as Brother Ambrose, a holy innocent despatched from his monastery into the world: he embraces sex (the delightful Louise Lasser) but casts out false religion (the usual venal evangelist). Ghostly farce. (Peter Boyle, Andy Kaufman, Richard Pryor; director, Marty Feldman.)

LEGEND OF THE LONE

RANGER

(ITC) Surely a candidate for canonisation as Clinker of the Year. A charmless,

witless biography of The Lone Ranger which wallows in endless sentiment before switching to what may possibly have been intended as parody. (Klinton Spilsbury, Michael Horse; director, William A. Fraker.)

MOSCOW DISTRUSTS TEARS

(Rank)

This good-hearted but turgid Mosfilm drama—three young Muscovites, first seen in 1958, grow up and go their inevitably separate ways—is chiefly instructive for the chasm it reveals between notions of popular entertainment. Here, such material would demand more aggressive and cynical packaging. (Vera Alentova, Irina Muraveva, Raisa Ryazanova; director, Vladimir Menshov.)

THE MOUSE AND THE WOMAN

(Facelift)

Deriving from a Dylan Thomas story, this brave independent venture, the first wholly Welsh-made feature, disappointingly comes out wild and woolly, a sub-Lawrentian mélange of class antagonism and carnal passion circa 1920. (Dafydd Hywel, Karen Archer; director, Karl Francis.)

92 IN THE SHADE

(ITC)

Writer Thomas McGuane made this film of his own novel in 1975. Regional oddity is cocooned in literary floss, existential conflict in an atmosphere worthy of Tennessee Williams. Rough as a film, it has an engaging bleakness and bleakness of vision. (Peter Fonda, Warren Oates.)

OUTLAND

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Sean Connery copes grimly with a script limply transposing *High Noon* into the space age, and with the electronic gadgetry and metalwork sets which seem endlessly inescapable in sci-fi movies. (Peter Boyle, Frances Sternhagen; director, Peter Hyams.)

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

(CIC)

What stands out most in this expensively gift-wrapped Saturday afternoon pot-boiler are the inconsistencies (a heroine who is one part Hawks and two parts Fay Wray; graphically out-of-keeping violence). Like everything in the film, the combination of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg is both *de trop* and not enough. (Harrison Ford, Karen Allen.)

STRIPES

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The principal merit of this surprisingly integrated comedy (from the makers of the money-spinning, ramshackle *Animal House* and *Meatballs*) derives from the sidelong regard in which it holds its hero (Bill Murray), a cheerful volunteer in the 'New' US Army, a 60s dropout made canny by the hard knocks of the 70s. (Harold Ramis, Warren Oates, P. J. Soles, Sean Young; director, Ivan Reitman.)

THIS IS ELVIS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The life and increasingly shook-up times of the late pop idol rendered in an awkward dramadoc blend of clumsy re-enactments and frequently fascinating actuality material. (Johnny Harra, David Scott, Rhonda Lyn; directors, Malcolm Leo, Andrew Solt.)

THREE IMMORAL WOMEN

(Entertainment)

The same mixture as *Immoral Tales*, but the three stories have crept even closer to exploitation. Some stunning Borowczyk images, which are deprived of any real context here and consequently fringe self-parody. (Marina Pierro, Gaëlle Legrand, Pascale Christophe.)

TIME BANDITS

(HandMade Films)

Captured by God's rebellious dwarfs, a sanguine British schoolboy is taken on a lunatic spree through time past. Director Terry Gilliam, uncertain of his tone, overspices the comic ploys with sprigs of metaphysics and lashings of violence. (Craig Warnock, Sean Connery, David Rappaport.)

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